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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the tenor and outcomes of the National Issues Forums held in 1991-92 on three issues. The report draws upon three resources: short participant questionnaires, descriptions from groups' convenors, and detailed analysis of the taped proceedings of 10 groups. The report is organized in three sections, each consisting of a report from the forums and excerpts from the public response to each issue by a group of representatives from the national media and Congress who met to review excerpts from the videotapes. The first forum report, "America's Role in the World: New Risks, New Realities," starts from the premise that what dominates people's minds when they think about shaping the U.S. role is the breakup of the Soviet Union. Discussion focuses on the following: United States as a solitary superpower; need for U.S. citizens to be much more frank about themselves and more objective about the rest of the world; the United States as leader, not policer, of the world; and need to concentrate on problems at home. The report on the second issue, "Energy Options: Finding a Solution to the Power Predicament," makes the point that the public's view as reflected in the forum discussions reveals a genuine concern about the energy crisis and how it affects and is affected by the national way of life. Topics include the cost of energy conservation, risks people are willing to live with, mistrust of nuclear energy, and need for a national energy policy. Forums held on the third issue, "The Boundaries of Free Speech: How Free Is Too Free?" indicate a worry about the precedents that any restriction would set. Focuses are sex and violence on television and in the movies and what to do about it, hateful speech, and children's right not to hear. (YLB)

ED 363 570

A PUBLIC VOICE . . . '92

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD

ENERGY OPTIONS

THE BOUNDARIES OF FREE SPEECH

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A Report
from the
National Issues Forums
Fall & Winter
1991 - 1992

SO 023 513

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A PUBLIC VOICE . . . '92

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD

ENERGY OPTIONS

THE BOUNDARIES OF FREE SPEECH

Each year, in communities throughout the United States, citizens meet to deliberate on critical national issues. These "town meetings," called the National Issues Forums, are sponsored locally by institutions such as schools and colleges, churches and senior citizen organizations, leadership and neighborhood associations, public libraries, and even individuals whose neighbors and friends have joined to form study circles in their own homes. The individual Forums have no connection to one another, but all of them use a nonpartisan discussion guide, prepared for the purpose by the Kettering Foundation and the Public Agenda Foundation, and many of the groups' moderators use a Moderator's Guide *prepared by Kettering.*

This is a report from the Kettering Foundation on the tenor and the outcomes of the Forums on three issues last fall and winter. It draws upon three sources. First, it uses the short questionnaires that are completed by participants at the start and close of their discussions. Since the participants are self-selected, and many of them do not complete both questionnaires, these do not have the validity of a genuine poll or survey; but they can provide useful indications of common turning points in the discussions, shared conclusions or concerns, and convictions from which whole groups of citizens are reluctant to budge. Second, it draws on descriptions from the convenors of the groups, useful in providing anecdote and quotation that reportedly have typified aspects of the discussions. And finally, the report is informed by detailed analysis of the proceedings of several groups — in Albany, Georgia; Davis, California; El Paso, Texas; Hempstead, New York; Indianapolis, Indiana; Madison, Wisconsin; Orange County, California; Panama City, Florida; Pomfret, Connecticut; and Somerville, Massachusetts, all of which were recorded in their entirety on audiotape or videotape.

In the spring of 1992, after the National Issues Forums for the year had concluded, a group of distinguished representatives from the national media and from Capitol Hill met to review excerpts from those videotapes.

David Gergen, editor at large of U.S. News & World Report, *Ellen Goodman, nationally syndicated columnist of the* Boston Globe, *Charlayne Hunter-Gault, national correspondent for the "MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour," and Frank Sesno, anchor of CNN; Senators John Chafee of Rhode Island, Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, and Timothy Wirth of Colorado; Representatives E. Thomas Coleman of the 6th District in Missouri, and Louise Slaughter of the 30th District of New York; and (representing the public generally) David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, William H. Gray III, president and CEO of the United Negro College Fund, and Dan Yankelovich, president of the Public Agenda Foundation, together looked at these excerpts from tapes of the Forums, along with brief video segments suggesting the typical media coverage of each issue, and brief video excerpts from the current political debate. They asked themselves, "How well are we, as a nation, addressing these issues? And if not well enough, who might do better: the media? the political leadership? the public?"*

Excerpts from their discussion of the public response to each issue — recorded for subsequent distribution to public television stations by Public Broadcasting's Eastern Educational Network — are included in this book, following the full report on the Forum discussions of each issue. (A transcript of that television program, and videocassettes, may be obtained by writing to: "A Public Voice," National Issues Forums, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.)

Such a report as this cannot, of course, claim to represent the voice of the American people. It does, however, capture the sense of some American people, widely differing in interests, in age and in background, as they share opinions and try together to come to a judgment about issues critical to the nation's well-being. To those of us who have been privileged to visit many Forums and to analyze the videotapes, it is striking how often people, talking together in quite different communities, reveal common values and push toward shared conclusions. Indeed it is a familiar experience among Forum moderators, and a gratifying one, to discover, as they exchange commentary with their peers, similar concerns; to find that they have led discussions driven by similar values; to learn that they have heard — from time to time and faintly — what surely must be an American public voice.

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AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD: NEW RISKS, NEW REALITIES

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD: NEW RISKS, NEW REALITIES

A Report on the Outcomes of the National Issues Forums

Received wisdom has it that Americans are not much interested in foreign policy; that when it is presented in terms of defense — against the attempts of an implacably hostile power, like the erstwhile Soviet Union, say, to take over their world and their way of life — then they are prepared to devote vast sums of money to it; but otherwise they would like not to be taxed in the interests of the rest of the world, nor troubled by it, and would prefer to leave foreign policy in the hands of the president.

The National Issues Forums' discussions, this past fall and winter, led us to conclude that nothing could be farther from the truth. Rather, here were Americans eager to give of their own time to discuss, with an unusual persistence and seriousness, the shape of their world. They revealed, as they exchanged opinions, a shared sense that we have no policy in this post-Cold War world; and a conviction that the rhetoric we use and the world picture we assume no longer reflect the world in which we live. For them — and this was consistent in Forums throughout the country — America's role has yet to be defined. And that conclusion is deeply troubling to them. A man in El Paso seemed to express the common sentiment with particular vigor:

> We have this gigantic national debt, and we have lost our competitive edge around the world. Our educational system is in shambles. Our health care system is in shambles. I've been to school board meetings where the attitude is not taking a look at the collective community, it's taking a look at individual greed. My concern is that "we've lost it!" We're looking at old dead photographs. We should be taking a look at moving videotape. There is a lack of direction; or really a lack of leadership; a lack of sound moral purpose about where we're going. I don't think that we are a superpower. I think that's a phantom — I think it's a "phantasma."

Without question, what dominates people's minds when they think about shaping America's role in the world is the breaking up of the Soviet Union, and of nation after nation of formerly communist Eastern Europe. And this occasions a sense of bewilderment, almost a disappointment — not because of what has happened elsewhere, but because of what has *not* happened in America. It is as though the world should have changed, but hasn't; as though America's sense of itself should have changed, but hasn't. The dominant recognition among these Americans, is of a chance *missed* . . .

A Solitary Superpower

The collapse of the Soviet Union has left the United States a solitary world superpower. Few in the Forums doubted this, nor did many suggest that we could or should abdicate that position lightly, or in a great hurry.

In this regard, occasional echoes of Cold War arguments could be heard, arguments that used to characterize the conflict between "hawks" and "doves." "Americans have the feeling that we're number one, and we're not at all ready to give that up now," a man in El Paso said, suggesting that clear military supremacy is still comforting in an uncertain world. "I think we have done a lot for the rest of the world," said a Madison, Wisconsin, participant, "and in order to do that we have to remain strong and we have to look out for our own." But for the most part, people in these Forums were trying to assess the meaning or the usefulness of the superpower role in a world without the Cold War. The quandary was typically described by another man in a Wisconsin Forum:

> There's an assumption that we somehow have a choice as to whether we're going to be a superpower or not. We *are* a superpower. We will continue to be a superpower for many years to come, just because of our own economic situation and the military establishment that we've created in this country over many, many years. So I don't think it's really a question of "Do we *want* to be a superpower?" We clearly are a superpower by most definitions and will continue to be. But how do we *exercise* the power?

Several other participants inclined to a view put forward by a young man in a Saturday morning Forum in El Paso: "Let us think of it as short term versus long term. In this light, not only is the U.S. obliged to play the leading role, for now, but it is expected to do so by other countries."

Once or twice, the specter of a resuscitated Soviet Union or an ambitious China was raised to confront those who urged that the U.S. military establishment be dismantled quickly, in order to address other domestic and global concerns. But to view these exchanges as a continuation of the old U.S. conflict between "hard-

liner" and "peacenik" would be radically to misunderstand them. It would misrepresent the tenor of these Forums. For overwhelmingly, and virtually everywhere, participants appeared to view the role of lone superpower as occasion for worry rather than triumph. "Now all of a sudden the Soviet Union is no longer a superpower," remarked a Texas woman. "We've bankrupted them and now we're the big guys. The power of that is very terrible." And a young Madison man reflected that "The idea of going solo in a global village is scary — and contradictory to what the rest of the world is trying to say."

An overwhelming preoccupation in these Forums, in fact, was not a difference in strategies or values or personalities, but a set of unmistakable concerns, expressed in Forum after Forum and generally shared: first, that the role of superpower cannot ultimately be sustained economically; second, that defense (in the Cold War, or military, sense) is no longer the principal interest of the U.S. or of the world; and third, that any attempt to force our values — our concept of "rights," in effect — on other nations without strong support from the international community would be, perhaps, unwarranted and certainly unwise.

A man in one of the El Paso Forums pointed out that "The cost of being the solo superpower is ridiculously prohibitive. The wear and tear on American citizens is immeasurable." "I feel we're in serious jeopardy," said another man. "If we don't change within the next five years, we're going to be the one that is now Russia." And a woman at another El Paso Forum provided this commentary:

> Historically, what has happened with countries that are constantly in conflict is that they simply bankrupt themselves. Over and over again the big empires have fallen because they engaged in military adventures in countries all over the world.

That the U.S. itself might, as the surviving superpower, employ its strength in the role of world policeman was clearly unpalatable, partly for this reason. "If the U.S. tries to continue to be the policeman of the whole world, it's not going to be a superpower much longer," concluded a woman in Albany, Georgia. And another woman responded:

> . . . Going around, pretending that we are in charge of everything, that we take care of everything, and that we have the answers — we have a lot of hostility out there towards this country because of that role. There's a distaste and disdain for anybody who's out there, pretending they have all the answers.

A man in Madison, Wisconsin, in fact, defined the term "superpower," as "an arrogant use of power, without any regard for other nations, other interests." The idea left participants unhappy; and the general sentiment, in all of these Forums, was that the U.S. should not be, as a man in El Paso put it, "the Lone Ranger of the world." By the close of the Forums, fully 70 percent of participants agreed that "it is no longer necessary for the U.S. to act as world policeman."

As the discussions proceeded — not just in one or a few Forums but generally, throughout the country — the deliberations began to reveal underlying skepticism about some of the principles of "power politics." The notion that the U.S. would always represent "right," as opposed to "wrong," is not seen as certain in the contemporary world. "We have shown that we can cause a great deal of damage," said one participant illustrating his point by reference to the Gulf War, "but I don't think we have any records that we got the results that we wanted out of it." And another man said: "The greatest consequence of this effort to maintain a balance of power is a perpetual arms race. . . . Countries are acquiring and developing all the time greater sophistication in weaponry."

One man at an afternoon Forum in El Paso described himself as "more scared of world tensions in the post-Cold War world than I was prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union," but any inclination to maintain a strong military to handle such tensions was, overall in these Forums, qualified and uncertain — as though, since the fragmentation of the former Soviet Union, people were uncertain of what they might be needing to protect themselves *from*. "We don't have an aggressor, with the Soviet Union broken up," said a man in Albany, Georgia. "There's no country that can overrun us." Said a man in one of the Madison Forums:

> It seems to me that for the last 50 years the focus of our foreign policy has been to stop communist expansion. But that no longer seems to be a concern. There are some decisions that have to be made prior to trying to refocus, to determine what the United States' foreign policy is going to be.

The question of change, after 50 years, was a strong undercurrent in the Forums. And sometimes a poignant one — as it was to a young man in Texas: "That old cliché of 'might makes right' has been followed from the beginning. No one has ever changed that. How are we going to change it now?"

Morality and Expediency

In these conversations, people showed some inclination to second-guess past policy, but little inclination to reexamine the rights and wrongs of the Cold War itself. What was clear, however, in group after group, was the sense that this is all now behind us; and that being so,

we need to start on a new path by being much more frank about ourselves and more objective about the rest of the world.

"Do we ourselves really know our democracy?" asked one young man, admittedly somewhat more extreme in his rhetoric than most. Another insisted that although we claim to support human rights and democracy elsewhere, we have tolerated human rights violations among allies. Two-thirds of Forum participants, overall, expressed agreement with the sentiment that "working for short-term gains with dictators like General Noriega or the late Ferdinand Marcos is immoral." In Madison, Wisconsin, a man similarly pointed to the hypocrisy of a stand on behalf of democracy, when we have clearly supported leaders who do not pursue our ideals, whenever it suited our purpose: "Often we helped some of the most brutal dictatorships, like Pol Pot's regime," he said. Remarks like this, in group after group, led to widespread comment on, or a general questioning of, the sincerity of our own preoccupation with human rights.

"Especially in Latin America, the U.S. is not perceived as benign and is interfering constantly in the affairs of certain countries. I don't think we should involve ourselves in the internal affairs of other countries," a woman in El Paso said. And a man in Albany, Georgia, said, "Let's face it, the United States has been guilty of economic exploitation of the Third World. . . . This is something that will have to be addressed." These discussants professed themselves to be variously liberal and conservative; yet they clearly shared a determination to reassess the moral imperatives behind American policy. In group after group, the shared conclusion was that "we are not perfect," and when asked, "What role should the U.S. play in the world?" only one in twenty of Forum participants placed highest priority on "promoting democracy and human rights, wherever they are threatened."

"It worries me to speak as if we're the good guys," said a Texas woman. "It seems like we have the idea that we do it so right and so perfect that it should be what everybody else does." "I don't always feel that what we have in this country is necessarily the best for everybody else in the world," echoed a woman in Georgia. Meanwhile, others expressed mistrust of the CIA and of their government. A woman in one Forum said:

> I don't trust the CIA at all around the world. I don't know what they're doing. They don't level with us on anything. The American people don't know what's going on.

"We haven't always *been* a moral force," observed one man in El Paso. And a woman responded:

> I don't have any problem with the United States being a moral force, but I don't think we've ever really been a ***moral*** force. Ever since World War II, we have supported any government that's been anti-communist. If a country says they're anti-communist, then we became their friends. I think if we really had a moral standard that we stuck to, and really believed in democracy, I think we're one of the countries that could pull it off. I think we really could do great things in the world. But we're just not doing it. Our government doesn't.

It should not for a moment be thought, however, that these people were engaged merely in a kind of public self-flagellation. In context, their purpose was evidently not to declare *mea culpa*. Rather, with apparent sincerity, at this moment when the nation does not feel itself threatened, they were trying to redefine America's role in the world. And in order to do so, they were coming to grips with a hard and very American question: how to reconcile some of the clear moral imperatives that Americans have always honored in theory, with the proper and necessary *self*-interest that they perceive must always tend to shape the limits of foreign policy. In one Forum, a woman with a command of recent history pointed out:

> Every time we have decided to continue to support the bad guys in the world, not only have we not won, but we've gotten something that was worse. We decided to support Chiang Kai-shek, hoping that we would rescue China from communism — and we got Mao; the day before Castro marched into Cuba, we supported Batista; when we got rid of the democratic reelected person in Iran, we got the Shah. And so every time we have tried to do that, we have gotten something worse. It's a strategy that simply hasn't worked out historically. Aside from the moral value that what we did I think was terrible, politically it never works out; we always end up getting something that could be worse than what we had before. I don't think that's a very good strategy.

By and large, the discussants in the groups that we monitored did not fully understand the kind of *realpolitik* that seeks a balance of power in order to secure international stability. Their desire to be right works against the notion of pursuing a peace by ensuring stable relationships among nations, regardless of their individual ideologies. Yet finally, a common ground in all of these groups was a nonetheless pragmatic solution that called for honor among themselves. The sense participants clearly shared was that, at the least, it is important to be honest about our own self-interest as we define our role in relation to others. A Texas

woman asked that we "be honest about self-interest and not couch it in some sort of patriotic language, which we did in the Persian Gulf." And a Madison, Wisconsin, man summed up this sentiment: "Frequently we speak about going to help a nation and in many respects we are talking about self-interest. I've nothing against talking about self-interest, but let's call it what it is."

From this followed a corollary, which quite apparently settled as a bedrock principle for foreign policy in the post-Cold War world among these groups: we have no obligation to make others in our own image, nor any right to do so; each nation must offer and pursue its own definition of human rights.

In group after group, our relationship with China after the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square were cited and discussed as an example that underscored this point, as in this contribution to the discussion in El Paso:

> Let me state from the outset that I'm vehemently opposed to human rights violations, political imprisonment and these things; but at the same time we are still trying to impose our will on another nation. If we cut off relations with China it's no different than — in some respects it's not different than — going into other countries and trying to impose our will militarily. But to me, one of the biggest problems that we face in the United States is that we try to judge other countries by standards that make sense in El Paso, Texas, or wherever we happen to be — standards that may not make sense at all in these other countries. If we go back into our history, in our earliest stages of development, there were gross violations. And everybody here knows that history. And so again, we're trying to impose our will on other countries. Again, I'm against the human-rights violations; at the same time, we have to recognize the other side of the coin.

Disgust with what Americans saw broadcast from Tiananmen Square still registers strongly, two years after the event; but the determination to affirm that judgment is compiled with a widespread reluctance to have it influence our *policy* toward China. Sixty-three percent of Forum participants at the conclusion of these discussions (up only slightly, from 58 percent at the outset) agreed that "We should develop working relationships with countries like China, even if they are guilty of human-rights violations." This might seem to be paradoxical, had it not emerged in the context of a discussion about himself (i.e., admitted) self-interest.

A New International Role

Participants in these Forums were not blind to the difficulties of implementing a policy designed to serve their own interests, driven by their own moral principles, in a world in which other nations may be driven by different principles toward potentially conflicting aims. One man in El Paso, for example, talked of the need always to support our friends. He thought back to the 1930s, wishing, with hindsight, that we had earlier moved against Nazi Germany, before the worst of the Holocaust: "If we remember back to World War II, the Holocaust, we should have stepped in long before that occurred." But granted their broad reluctance to act as the world policeman, participants in these discussions repeatedly affirmed the notion that the United States, being clearly the most powerful of nations, must look for ways *morally* to lead, rather than to police the world with its arms.

It must be remembered that individuals in these groups were very different, one from another, and their ideas of tactics varied enormously. There were those reluctant to trust other nations, and still sold on the idea of remaining a superpower. There were those obsessed with the inadequacies of our own democracy, and inclined to emphasize needs at home, rather than the troubles of others. There were those, with the Cold War behind them, eager to reduce military spending and turn their backs on war. And there were those not at all ready to give up our military position in the world, no matter what the fate of other powers might be. There were those for whom the experience of the Gulf War had been a step toward multinational peacekeeping efforts; and there were those who find it still hard to accept a United Nations role. Everywhere, there were differences of opinion. Yet these did not mask commonalities of concern. Paradoxically, the different voices, coming from contrary directions, fixed the common interests all the more sharply in focus.

For example, participants were by no means united in the sense that the U.S. *should* take the lead in global matters. But there was clearly a shared judgment that the United States could not see itself other than in a world context: consistently, nine out of ten participants held to the view that "America cannot afford to turn its back on the rest of the world." As a young woman in El Paso put it:

> I think that we need to think in global terms and we need to see ourselves in the world. We need to help our neighbors around the world, and in terms of building cooperation, and in terms of working with each other to address the problems that face all of us.

A woman in Albany, Georgia, was similarly preoccupied:

> Now is the time to initiate something, while we still have the credibility of being a superpower, while we can exert some influence in the United Nations environment. Not that we are going to

dominate, but that we can make sense, based on our ideals.

In the discussions that followed these comments and others like them in other Forums, the issue of America's relationship to the larger world was extensively explored. "It's a fallacy to think that any country could do anything by itself in this world," said a young Texas woman. "We've got to work in the international community." "We need to work together," said a woman from Albany, Georgia. And a woman in Madison inclined to this multinational and cooperative approach to foreign policy because, as she said:

> It goes along with what I am as a person. I don't go out and seek power or do things on my own. I work with groups of people all the time and try to find the common denominators that help us.

What exactly such international efforts might move *toward* was not always clear in the mind of the participants, although in every group, those who were concerned about the needs of other peoples throughout the world received a surprisingly respectful hearing. "People need food," said a young and clearly committed woman in El Paso. "There is a basic misconception of what the problem is and what would bring peace and security to the world. If people cannot eat, if people cannot get good jobs, then there can be no peace in the world." "Every country must be helped to develop," said an older man; and in another Forum, one participant summarized: "Let's deal with those issues — as superpowers and as other nations — that are going to affect us most, that are threatening our existence."

When, however, a woman in Madison said, "It seems to me that in our present world situation, we need to hold hands, because there are common problems that all of us have, and we can't do it alone," another participant was quick to respond: "But you can't hold hands with people who don't want to hold hands with you." It would be a misjudgment to take this sentiment — that the United States should fashion its own role as a conscious partner in the international community — merely as a manifestation of the "CARE" approach to international crises. Nor did it reflect the kind of tilt toward world federalism that was popular in some circles decades ago. Indeed, one woman in El Paso warned:

> I saw this in world federalism in the late forties and early fifties. Unfortunately, every time we've gotten cooperation we've had to pay very dearly for it. I think this is not a pragmatic solution.

In effect, the real concern of these citizens was to find a framework that would express the United States' commitment to the world community, while at the same time limiting its obligations. And this new interest in international cooperation and international organizations had been made possible by two factors: the end of the Cold War and Americans' reluctance to assume again responsibility for policing the world.

The implications of such internationalism seemed to leave Forum participants divided, however, both among themselves and within themselves. The Gulf War was a point of reference in this discussion, although it did not figure prominently (and indeed, granted the major part it had occupied in the national consciousness quite recently, it had surprisingly little impact on participants' thinking this past winter, just one year later). "We wouldn't have been able to do what we did without the United Nations," argued a man in Madison. But for some in these discussions, the Gulf expedition was seen as a war of self-interest, scarcely masked by general support from the United Nations.

Similarly, there were different degrees of concern and trust as participants talked about the role of the international community in policing itself and the likelihood of the United States committing itself to serve international will. One man, early in a Texas Forum, when someone suggested that the United States should follow any decision made by the majority of the United Nations, had immediately said, "No way! I'm not going to let them do that." Toward the Forum's close, he said, "That's a shock to me — that I would respond that way. And after the discussion, I've sort of modified that view. But it would still be very difficult for me to take the United States as having to listen to the opinion of the world and act just because the United Nations said so. That's still hard for me to accept." He was not alone in that dilemma, although, overall, 84 percent of the participants completing the closing questionnaire said that "organizations such as the United Nations are better able to resolve regional conflicts and maintain world peace" (up from 77 percent at the start).

Whatever the degrees of uncertainty about America's likely relationship with the United Nations, however, it was clear in these Forums — perhaps surprisingly so — that ***uncertainty*** about America's role in the international community had now replaced what used to be a ***conviction*** about America's role as "leader of the free world." And the matter was of equal concern to those who appear ostentatiously proud of their nation in the world and to those who loudly lament deterioration here, at home.

Minding Our Own Business

It is widely accepted that, with the end of the Cold War, Americans have turned their interests (and would like to turn their money) to address the many problems at home. The story has the flat ring of a platitude. And like all platitudes, it is not, on the face of it, at odds with the truth: evidence abounded in the National Issues Forums to support this view. But — again, like all

platitudes — it blurs another truth that is more complex and more important.

On the basis of these Forums, one must conclude, not that Americans have turned from the world to focus on their domestic problems, but rather that they have *enlarged* their interest in the world and are attempting to redefine the relationship of their own national life to it. The domestic condition of the U.S. has become a central factor as people consider its position internationally. In political commentaries and media stories, those two interests, domestic and foreign, are seldom bound as closely as they were in the discussions of these Forums.

If there was one clearly shared judgment in all of the Forums, it was that the United States can no longer, as a young woman put it, "think or act as though the world were our empire," and there was a widespread sentiment that the United States needs now to look after itself:

> We have to get back to basics and build this country from the bottom up again. The people are really hurting down here and they really need it. So we have to help our own people. If we keep helping everybody else, eventually there's going to be nothing left here to give. There comes a time when charity begins at home, when help begins right here and now.

So spoke one woman in Madison, Wisconsin. And in all of the Forums that we have monitored, there were strong expressions of concern about what seemed to be a fragmenting society here, and a proliferation of needs that had grown up at home during the Cold War. Another woman in Madison was eloquent in this regard:

> We won the war and, in the meantime, we're sort of coming apart at the seams. Older people are being accused of taking away from kids, and so forth. We all know what the problems are. We are not a united country anymore. It seems to me that if we somehow leave these military things to the United Nations, and concentrate on solving some of the problems that are common problems the world around — we could be farther ahead. I saw something the other day about the fact that many people all over the world look to this country as being the perfect, the ideal democracy; but they don't know what's happening here. What we need to do is put our house in order so that we become what people think we are.

The metaphor, "coming apart at the seams," was heard in several Forums in a similar context:

> Our first priority has to be our own country, and I think that it's very hypocritical of us to go prancing around the world, trying to protect the world order when, within our own country, we're falling apart. I think that we have so many children below the poverty level that to me it is a human rights issue. How can we be champions of human rights around the world if we're not even concerned about our own children? To me that is the greatest hypocrisy of all: to say that we have to protect peace around the world, and we're not concerned about what is going on at home. And I think that what we are in danger of doing is the same thing that happened to the Soviet Union, when they were considered a military power — a superpower — and they channeled all their money into that military strength, while their country fell apart because the people got nothing. And I think that this is probably the greatest danger that we face: that we're going to fall apart at the seams, trying to control the business of the world; that we're not looking within at what needs to be done here.

Sooner or later, in every Forum, somebody would reflect on the need to provide better for education and for health care — like this man in Wisconsin:

> The American ethic is that, when we are determined that we will pull together and fight: Pearl Harbor, Desert Storm, those types of things. They clearly show that we are able to respond to a significant threat from the outside. But we can't continue at the level we are at now. The economy just can't take it. We can't educate our kids; we can't keep people healthy; we can't keep drugs off the street. And clearly by diverting a large part of the military budget to working on these domestic issues, we can hope to resolve some of them. Not that throwing money at it is going to resolve it, but I think we can work toward it. I believe there is enough fat in the military budget now that we could pare it back significantly without really impairing our military capability.

Perhaps inevitably, these discussions invariably led to the question of money: "We need to pay for these things and we can't. We can't afford them," said an El Paso man. "The trade-off is in the cut of defense spending." At the start of the Forums only 10 percent of respondents gave priority to maintaining "our current level of military spending," and that was down to 4 percent at their close. The sentiment was heard in every Forum — and often accompanied by familiar stories of waste, fraud, and abuse in military procurement.

But all of the Forums were fundamentally serious and there was a shared awareness that the redirecting of expenditures from military to domestic priorities

would hurt. "How do we cut the military expense without threatening ourselves?" asked a Texas man. "There are going to be a lot of jobs lost by cutting back on the military, a lot of civilian jobs," said a participant in Georgia. And the following exchange between a man and a woman participant was typical of both the doubts and the determination expressed in these Forums.

> *Man:* We talk about cutting defense to give us money to spend in other places. Cutting defense by 50 percent, that's 10 years down the road. Do you have ten years to wait? When we talk about cutting military defense, we're talking about bodies. We'll still need some kind of defensive mechanism. That means technology. That's more money. We cut defense, we cut bodies, but we added on more money for more technology, for more "smart" weapons.
>
> *Woman:* We put these guns aside, and we'll have the money. We have built a lot of talent, a lot of power in the military establishment. Can't we have a government that makes a plan for the skills we need to have when the environment is deteriorating around us? If we give up our guns, what are we going to offer instead of ROTC? Are we going to say to a young high school person, we'll help you through college because you're going to speak Chinese, know politics, be bilingual, and have the skills that the world will need tomorrow for survival? I think we can do that.

But as a participant in Madison pointed out, this will take time:

> . . . It's still going to take a gigantic social and economic reshuffling to bring that on. It's going to take time and it's going to take, I think, a national commitment. It's going to take a commitment of the population of this country to say, "All right, we want to do that."

This recognition of the difficulty of firmly addressing what seemed to be demanding needs on the domestic front led participants in many of these Forums to begin to discuss the need for national planning. "If we are changing over from military spending to paying for domestic programs," a woman asked, "how is it going to be managed?" "What would happen in an economic downturn?" asked a participant at one of the El Paso Forums. "We need national priorities."

Participants voiced a profound concern that we appear to have no national policy in this respect. And it struck many of them as odd, since, in their shared recollection, there had, at different times, been national leadership and a national policy that moved the country significantly forward. One young man quipped that the military-industrial complex itself had "proved to be the largest government-sponsored jobs program in the history of the world"; and arguments about the effective role of the government in the Great Depression and in World War II were heard in many Forums.

Nine out of ten Forum participants, consistently, viewed "domestic problems like unemployment, homelessness, and crime" as serious threats to our country's national security interests. Indeed, at times, in many of these discussions, it seemed that the subject had moved from foreign policy to the consideration of what would seem to be national domestic crises; and from the discussion of international affairs to the discussion of the competitiveness of the American economy. The juxtaposition, however, should not be misinterpreted. It could not be more important.

For although the received wisdom nowadays has it that Americans are no longer much interested in foreign affairs but are totally preoccupied by the domestic scene, these were not Americans who have given up on the rest of the world, turning inwards in a kind of *fin de siècle* isolationism. Far from it! These were citizens attempting, with a remarkable seriousness, and with a profound sense of the complexity of the task, to re-envision the role of the United States in the world. For them, America's role in the world had to do inevitably with how we see ourselves. Hence, they moved repeatedly into considerations of U.S. competitiveness, of the life-style to which we are accustomed — even, indeed, to questions about the environment, recycling, and the way we address disposable waste. And discussions directly about these questions were interrupted, too, by serious exploration of what was seen by some to be a growing inequity in this country.

Consider again the woman in Madison, who had expressed deep concern about our democracy, about our inability to be what others supposed. Hers was merely one of many attempts in these Forums — in a nation she described as "coming apart" internally — to explore the degree to which Americans could help solve their own problems by a more effective understanding of their relationship to the problems that others faced. Another man in the same Forum developed the theme:

> We need to rebuild our own country. I agree with that — except that I think we have to take a broader view. What happens in our country affects other countries; what happens in other countries will affect us, in one way or another. And I don't think we can stand back — as we did 100 years ago — behind the big sea, because there isn't one anymore. We can no longer have the luxury of *only* looking at this country, in terms of problems that are affecting the majority of the world. So I think that it has to be a bal-

anced plan — where we are taking care of our people and the problems of our people, yet in many respects are looking at the same kind of problems also in the rest of the world.

The movement in these Forums across the country did not start from a concern for America's defense and thence nudge toward domestic issues. Rather, it was throughout *as though foreign policy had become a domestic issue itself.* Participants were not making a choice of one strategy rather than another — of hard-line Americanism or liberal internationalism, of a balance-of-power *realpolitik* or a new commitment to international machinery. Rather, they were groping toward a new policy: one that is infused by a kind of internationalism that is not typically American, historically; and one that is impelled by a sense that America has problems that need to be addressed as a priority, but that are not unrelated to the experiences of other nations and the ways in which we deal with them.

> I really don't think that we can isolate ourselves to focus just on domestic issues. I think we're part of an international community, like it or not. We're out there. You just can't pull back. You can't decide. "Okay! Well now, I'm not going to play. I'm going home." I think that's unrealistic. But I do think we need to redirect, refocus; and we need to educate.

The interest in the United Nations and international collaborations, expressed in these Forums is surprising and new; but it accompanies a sense that the United States, having been a world leader for so many years — and having made sacrifices during that time — has been much vilified and now is neither rich enough nor strong enough to go it alone anymore. And these Forum participants appear to be asking themselves both "Why should we?" and "What, then, should we do?"

Toward the New World

It is perhaps worth noting that in all of these discussions the name of the President came up scarcely at all and the name of the Secretary of State — even the title — never! This is not what one typically expects when Americans settle down to serious discussion of foreign affairs.

Quite apparently, the concern of the Americans who joined in discussion at these Forums was not with what had passed, but with what is to come — a future about which they think there is no policy, and for which they fear there will be none, unless they, as a people, can articulate their interests afresh. One young woman in an El Paso meeting, who defined herself as a conservative, remarked:

> Our values and our priorities are in the wrong place. We're too busy worrying about the rest of the world now, and not worrying about ourselves. We've been in that power position for such a long time that we've taken it for granted. And now we're losing it. We went into the Persian Gulf and did what we had to do, but we're losing it now. Because we've lost what's important: our values, and what the United States was based on. We're losing it — we're not taking care of ourselves. If we don't take care of ourselves, you can't expect us to go out and take care of the rest of the world. We're falling apart inside. We're not falling apart on the outside right now; we've won out over the rest of the world; we've shown them what we were capable of doing. And now we're falling apart on the inside. We should turn around and look back inside and say "Okay, now let's keep our status. Let's keep that aura the United States has." In order to do that, we've got to turn around and look back inside.

Another woman in the same discussion characterized much of what was said as "talking about a world that has already passed." "Everything is not the same," said another young lady. "If you take the time to look at other nations — yes, it has really dramatically changed in a couple of years. Everything is not the same and we have to take a new perspective on it."

In group after group, there appeared an obsession with change. And as for the likelihood of our being able so to change, after 45 years of a world of "us and them" (as one Forum expressed it), there remained optimism:

> Nobody would have believed that Europe could ever become unified. It took 35 years for them to do this, but Western Europe is becoming unified. Who would have thought that the French and the Germans are now planning to have some kind of military army together? Nobody would have ever believed that could happen, yet they managed to work out over a long period of time — they worked out all the past difficulties and they have come together. I think if it can happen in Western Europe . . . and it's working out so well that all the other countries in Europe are lining up, trying desperately to join them. So I think that it's not idealistic and that such things are absolutely possible.

This sentiment from a woman in Texas was widely shared: if Europe could refashion itself in a way so contrary to all of its history, then surely we, in the United States, could similarly create another world.

Yet that brave new world, which merely glimmered around the perimeters of these discussions, was clearly more than a romantic dream for the participants: it was

a pragmatic ideal for them. And it was a necessary one.

There remained among the Americans who participated in the Forums, an instinctive idealism, the sense that foreign policy *ought* to support those who pursue the true, the right, and the good as they, Americans, define it. And now that the threat of Soviet dominance — "the evil empire," as Ronald Reagan had called it — has been removed, there surfaces everywhere a kind of puzzlement, even regret, that our policies have not in fact been so directed.

These Americans recognized that U.S. policy for 45 years was based on anti-communism and the need for defense against a continuing threat from the Soviet Union. They perceived that America's role throughout those decades was defined by its opposition to another power. They accept this; even though already many of them — voices in every Forum — speculate that this may have created a world worse than it might have been. This notwithstanding, that world, and that role, had ended for these Americans, as the Cold War ended. And it was as though, for them, America itself now needed to be reinvented.

So they were searching for a role that is not based upon the primacy of military strength and not dominated by the idea of being the world's policeman. They appear to be trying to imagine a role that is not defined by the need for defense against an enemy, but by the ability to collaborate on common problems. They look to see themselves as a healthy, independent nation, first and foremost, but still playing a role in an international community. They are a public that looks for a foreign policy that is consonant at all points with their sense of what is important here at home.

They do not at all agree on the details of implementation that such a policy might entail; nor are they talking about "America's role in the world" as though their discussions would yield the kind of policy that is written into party platforms. Rather, these citizens were looking for a *vision* of America — and apparently their leaders had not yet presented such a vision to them. Nor were they themselves able to shape that vision clearly, although they were obviously groping to fill in the broad outlines from points that they do perceive exactly.

This may be the reason why, over every one of these Forums that we have documented and analyzed, there remained, at the close, an uneasy sense of foreboding. It was thought one world had gone, not entirely happily, and no new one had been descried to replace it. There was an abiding sense that a chance may be — may have *been* — missed. As a woman in Albany, Georgia, remembered:

> To me, when we saw, two years ago, the Wall coming down . . . I remember that New Year's — when they showed all the events that happened that year . . . of course, Tiananmen Square was devastating, but everything else that happened . . . we were united as a world. And it was the most wonderful feeling. I don't remember feeling like that, except maybe back in 1969, when there was the first landing on the moon and we all looked, as a people from the earth, up to the moon and thought: We're in this all together, they're representing all of us as a world. It may seem to be an ideal; but we have to strive for the ideal. And if we don't, we're really going to have problems. If we could just get together and talk about this! There are so many other things, so many gifts that we have to offer one another that we're wasting because we're so concerned about our military strength. How are we going to appear to the rest of the world? We want to be the superpower. But I think we're losing sight of what life is all about and how to really protect our world.

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD:

A Response from the Media and from Capitol Hill

Frank Sesno: *It's very easy to present to the public — and the public is very willing to listen to — foreign policy, or other events, that are of immediate, tangible concern to them: there's a war going on; people may die; people will die. People listen to that. But where things become much more diffuse, and much more difficult to put your finger on, it's much more difficult for us to present that story — because it's many stories, many issues happening all at once; it's military; it's social; it's domestic; it's competitiveness. One of the things that I've seen an awful lot of in public and political debate is that all too often this is presented as an either-or situation. Either we are a superpower, we have a military presence or force to project, or we dedicate ourselves, our resources, to problems at home. I don't believe they're mutually exclusive, and I think that the big challenge is to find a way to combine the two.*

David Gergen: *I'm very encouraged about what we've heard here this morning about the public, coming around to the view, which I think is healthy, that we have to solve our domestic problems in order to continue international leadership, and to recognize the interplay between the domestic and the international. To me at least, the public is showing a good deal of maturity. You know, one of the things that happens in this country is that we assume — we, in effect, learn from our past more than we, more than we normally assume in Washington. There is a tendency sometimes in Washington to be a little condescending toward the public, frankly. And to sort of think it's the great unwashed multitudes out there — and the wise men in Washington can solve all these problems. And in fact, what this conversation has suggested so far is that there is an underlying common sense in the public that ought to be respected.*

Dan Yankelovich: *There's a real conviction that the country has to work with the U.N., has to work with other countries. There's great pride and concern that we maintain our military strength, that we maintain our role in the world, that we support democracies. But at the same time, there's the feeling that the time has come — echoed by many people in the foreign policy establishment — to focus on domestic affairs, and that is now a greater threat to the national security than any threat from outside our borders.*

Ellen Goodman: *Identity crisis — I think this is what you heard in a lot of those remarks. What does it mean to be an American, post-Cold War? Who are we as Americans? What is our place in the world? What do we think about ourselves and our country? And you don't hear that discussion going on at the highest levels of the Senate. You hear business-as-usual language in the discussion; there's sort of a* pro forma *acknowledgment that we're in a new world, but there isn't that sort of gut response: Okay, who are we; what is our place in the world? The notion of being a superpower was because there was another superpower, and we were in conflict. Now we're in some world order, but the superpower language doesn't work. People feel that it doesn't work.*

John Chafee: *We can't rule the world; we can't make the world dance to our . . . . We can't intervene in every situation. What happens in Bosnia-Herzgovina isn't solely the United States going in and taking charge; there are other people that we've got to. . . . We've got to move in a multinational way to a far greater extreme. But the point, I think the key point was, that not one of them, that I heard, said: "Get out of Europe, we're through there, we've done our part; the Europeans are rich; let them do it; or let the Japanese handle their problems." I felt that there was more of an internationalism present than many of us would give the American public, across the nation, credit for. It seems to me one of the interesting things in the Forum that we saw was that nobody was just trashing foreign aid, for example, or talking about: "Let's get those troops out of Europe." Now that's a great seller on the floor of the Senate, and many politicians make a living out of that, saying: "I've never voted for foreign aid." That's a banner that they wave. But these people were way ahead of the politicians, I think.*

Louise Slaughter: *Certainly these people are way ahead of us, and that debate up on the Hill still continues as though that threat was as real today — and we're going to go right ahead spending that money. And yet, I will tell you the voices of the people I hear I have not had a single person ever say to me: "Can we still spend 150 billion dollars on NATO? I would like to protect West Germany from East Germany." I don't hear that debate anywhere.*

Joseph Lieberman: *There's a danger in that statement the gentleman made about the United States no longer being a superpower. The danger in what is said is that it expresses a lack of national confidence, which will give birth to a lack of national will. That is not based on reality. We are in fact a superpower. We are the strongest*

economy in the world. We just passed the Germans as the number one exporters in the world. Our culture sets the standard for world culture: good or bad, it's copied all around the world. Our citizenship is coveted more than any other in the world; people are standing in line, pleading to get in here. And to say the obvious, in the aftermath of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, our democratic ideals and our basic economic principles are the envy of the world, and people are trying to emulate them all around the world. So I'm not saying that we should become self-satisfied. What I'm saying is that in order to have within us — to find our strength to deal with these very real problems that we have at home, and indeed, to continue our responsibilities abroad — it's important not to be too down on ourselves.

Louise Slaughter: *What these people are saying to us is: "Don't blow this opportunity to let us get back to our own business." Not in an isolationist way! But they understand, and those of us in Congress certainly know, that when the changes began to happen, and when we saw Eastern European countries clamoring to us for help, we didn't have anything to give them but love, and best wishes, and copies of the Bill of Rights. So, we are not going to be able economically to be a superpower and help everybody out. Now, what I think these people were saying to me, and what they say to me at the supermarket every weekend when I go home is: "Look, Louise, I can't worry about that. I may lose my job. I'm not sure I can pay the college tuition. Jobs are leaving here left and right. Will you please take care of that so that we don't have that threat in the world? But at the same time, please, make sure that we are secure here at home." They know that national security is dependent on economic security. There's no two ways about it.*

Ellen Goodman: *People are talking the language of values. On the one hand, our values as enunciated traditionally are enormously attractive in the wider world — we do attract people to the American standard. On the other hand, we're not living up to it. On the one hand, we see our place in an economic world, and that scares us and endangers us, and we are very conscious of not having our own house in order. And you hear this — you just don't hear the same language being used. And I think people are indeed — we've said that in many ways — people are far ahead of their leaders — alleged leaders because the leaders are still trying to hold on to this structure, this mental structure that has worked for a while; and the people are already saying, "Whoa — it's over! Now, how do we think about ourselves in the rest of our lives?"*

Charlayne Hunter-Gault: *You know the poet, Robert Lowell says: "New occasions teach new duties." The world is very different now, or it's starting to be very different. And how do you function in a new world in the old way — which is one of the questions that people are asking. There are a lot of people out here with answers. There are a lot of people who are not surprised about what went on in Los Angeles. If you read the newspapers and listen to television, much of the commentary suggests that this was a surprise. Well, for people whose voices are not heard routinely, this was not a surprise. And if we could figure out some way to involve them in the process . . .*

Tim Wirth: *I wonder, here we are sitting a few days after this explosion in Los Angeles . . . . You know, I wonder how much of an event is that going to be in terms of getting people in this country to focus seriously — all of us, whether it's our institutions of the Senate, or the House, or the press, or people at home focusing seriously, around the country — at some enormous inequalities in the United States, some huge gaps in terms of education, the ability of all people to participate in an increasingly competitive world. Look at all of the discussions of our role in this rapidly changing world. Is Los Angeles going to focus for us in the United States the kind of effort that I think we started to see in the late 1960s after the riots at that point?*

Bill Gray: *I think, if anything, that it is another magnet to attract people back toward the domestic side of the equation, and push, perhaps, for a reexamination of the balance between foreign policy versus domestic policy. I think in the 1980s, you had a great emphasis on the foreign policy side, particularly through the projection of military expenditures. And now I think what I'm hearing out there at every level, from all sorts of people, is a need to bring more balance to that and focus on the domestic side of the equation.*

Dan Yankelovich: *Now, the anomaly, as far as the relationship between the public and Washington is concerned, is that people feel that the threat to the United States of things not working — of race relations not working, of the economy not working, of health care not working, of education not working — that it's a real crisis almost of governmental legitimacy, so why don't the people in Washington take this as seriously as they took the threat from Iraq? The tradition in the country has always been that if there's a real threat from outside, we unite behind a nonpartisan approach. Now the logic of people's views is that there is such a threat; it's from the inside; it's even more serious — so why don't you get that kind of response? Part of the frustration of the public is a feeling that that part of the message isn't getting through, that people in the Congress and the White House are still fooling around as if there were no serious crisis.*

David Gergen: *The thing I sense is that they — there's a good deal of common wisdom out among the people. But at the same time, folks in this country are uncertain, as Ellen has said, about the direction, what our identity*

is. And they're discouraged about the capacity of our government in particular, about our institutions in general, to deal with the realities we face.

Frank Sesno *(interrupts Gergen): Including the media!*

David Gergen: *Including the media!*

Frank Sesno: *Maybe especially the media!*

David Gergen: *Well, I think the media is certainly part of the list of villains anyone might draw up. And to go back to something that Tim had raised — because I think it was a fundamental point — we need to think about the last 45 years and figure out what worked, and what didn't work. What we do know is that after the Second World War, after some hesitation after the Second World War, we came together as a people, formed a foreign policy, and we stuck to it for some 45 years. Whereas in the domestic field, one now feels as if, when you look back at what we did after — during — the 60s, with the riots, and the marches, we thought we made a national commitment to racial progress in this country; and now we feel, after Los Angeles, we've come full circle and we really didn't make it. We stopped; we lost our way somewhere along the way. We look at the question of energy: we thought we made a commitment to independence in energy, and we really haven't made that; we haven't fulfilled that; we're going backwards in many significant ways. And the question becomes: Why were we able to be successful on the foreign policy side, and to sustain a policy for a long period of time, commanded by support across the board mostly, but were unable to follow through on the domestic side? I think what we have to do is look back and say: how do we come to some agreement or some sense of where we're heading in the next ten years or twenty years that's not only international, but domestic.*

Charlayne Hunter-Gault: *We don't have to reinvent the wheel in order to deal with the post-Cold War world, we just have to listen to some of those voices that haven't been heard before.*

ENERGY OPTIONS: FINDING A SOLUTION TO THE POWER PREDICAMENT

ENERGY OPTIONS: FINDING A SOLUTION TO THE POWER PREDICAMENT

A Report on the Outcomes of the National Issues Forums

For the past ten years, the energy issue has been pushed to the periphery of most Americans' attention. A lack of interest on the part of the administration, an oil glut in the international market pushing gasoline prices down, and lack of media attention to the issue — these have all doubtless contributed to the neglect. Foreign policy crises still, now and then, bring the energy issue to the fore: both the Iran-Iraq war and the recent Gulf War renewed Americans' worries about the disruption of oil supplies and resulting hikes in gasoline prices. But such concern about oil supplies soon gets pushed to the periphery again, displaced from people's attention by more urgent domestic events. Hence, the common wisdom is that people are not really concerned about the energy issue, except insofar as it affects the pocketbook! As long as they do not think we have a crisis at hand, it remains more important to address issues such as the economy, crime, abortion, and so on. Yet the National Issues Forums, held this past fall and winter in communities all over the country, suggest that the American people do find the energy problem to be very serious, despite the fact that they seldom talk about it as a crisis.

The public's views as reflected in these discussions revealed a genuine concern about the energy crisis and how it affects and is affected by our way of life. They revealed a public ready to grapple with the issue of how our patterns of energy use affect our health, our comfort, the fate of our grandchildren, even the quality of life in the rest of the world. And although participants in the Forums recognized that this is too big a problem for individuals to solve, none of them was willing to abdicate responsibility in the matter.

The Energy Crisis and the American Way of Life

In general, these citizens tended to think of energy as a long-term problem that political leadership — and American society as a whole — is not taking seriously enough. A participant in Somerville, Massachusetts, explained:

> It's a very easy life here; and so we don't feel the crisis at hand. I think there is a crisis at hand. And I think that the government, being the most powerful institution we have, and with the most access to money, should take the initiative.

And recalling gasoline shortages in the seventies, one man from Pomfret, Connecticut, noted that, "when there were gas lines and people physically experienced 'not enough' — that really brought it to the surface. But now there is no physical experience of 'not enough,' so it remains a back burner issue."

Nevertheless, 74 percent of the participants left the Forums thinking of the energy problem in this country as "very serious" and in the course of the discussions in all of these Forums, participants expressed themselves puzzled that, despite evidence to the contrary, the American public — they themselves, indeed — still does not typically think about the energy problem in terms of a crisis. As a young man in an Indianapolis Forum explained:

> In my high school career, I've seen just one videotape about the energy crisis, and that had absolutely no impact on me. And I really didn't see it have an impact on anyone else in the class. I mean, all the time we spend watching MTV or reading about Elvis still being alive — I think that a lot of the things that we watch on TV or read in the newspaper are not really pertinent to what's going on, because we are tearing up our environment.

One reason for this reluctance to address an energy crisis lies apparently in people's reluctance to start considering changes in their life-style. The same young man reflected, at the close of the Forum:

> One thing that remains unresolved for me, and it is distressing for me, is that I know I'm getting ready to go home . . . in my car . . . and that I'm going to go home and watch television . . . and I'm gonna have my lights on. . . .

Participants observed that because they are accustomed to certain things and to a certain way of life, it becomes difficult for them to treat the energy problem as a matter of life and death, likely to warrant serious changes in the way they consume energy, and eventually affecting the quality of their life. A young woman in Somerville, Massachusetts, explained:

> We have the biggest addiction to electricity, I know. I grew up in a house where everything was climate-controlled. We never opened a window. It was always super cold in the summer, or very

nice and super toasty. You could go into the bathroom and turn on a heat switch or a heat lamp and all that stuff. Then when I left home and was on my own, it was so painful just to be so inconvenienced.

For similar reasons, when the Forums asked whether people would be willing to try renewable energy resources, many participants were skeptical of the willingness of Americans to change their ways. A participant in one of the Indianapolis Forums thought that, "If people are given, first of all, an explanation they can reasonably trust as to why they need to change, if they are given alternatives and incentives to try different sources, they will try some new things." But another participant in the same Forum had a somewhat less optimistic view: "We need an emergency. Until there is a very real national emergency, people won't move fast."

Yet Forum participants were aware that the energy problem is serious enough to warrant immediate discussions, even action. In fact, three out of four indicated this in questionnaires completed at the start of discussion; and by its close, 83 percent had come to think of the energy problem as serious enough to warrant action. Much of the intervening discussions had focused on the kinds of trade-offs people were willing to make between short-term comforts, maintaining a decent standard of living, and long-term costs, particularly environmental costs. Participants also voiced deep feelings about their responsibilities in preserving a healthy environment for the rest of the world and the next generation — a topic that made the environmental costs inherent in our present way of living a particular concern. One Indianapolis participant said, "Beginning with the Industrial Revolution and culminating now, environmental problems have been compounding themselves for decades, and they are no longer tolerable." Another in the same Forum said, "I'd like for my grandchildren to be able to breathe without gas masks. We need to change our life-styles and look at our value system."

Although people remained skeptical about whether Americans would actually prove willing to give up many of the short-term benefits of high energy consumption, a large majority of the participants (71 percent) indicated that for them, damage to the environment was clearly the most serious factor in the energy problem and a compelling reason to treat it as urgent. Too much dependence on foreign oil was also seen as a serious component of the energy problem by 65 percent, overall, of Forum participants, and these two factors together provided an urgency to all of these discussions. That urgency was an insistent counterpoint to participants' admitted addiction to a high-energy-consumption way of life.

In the course of the discussions, many participants gave testimony to the benefits of different methods of energy conservation that they themselves had practiced, such as home insulation and using mass transit. These stories may have influenced some of the participants to endorse conservation. Forum participants generally agreed that conservation should be a bigger part of the national energy strategy, and 53 percent of them viewed it as the easiest way to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. It was not, however, considered a solution that could stand alone in meeting our energy demands. As one Indiana man said, "We have to do this, but along with something else, because sooner or later, conservation by itself won't be sufficient. Demands will go up because of increased industry and increased population. Yet you still have to do as much as possible to conserve." Some 62 percent of Forum participants strongly agreed that no matter how much we conserve, we will still need other sources of energy in the future.

Interestingly, many participants assumed that energy conservation was not just about energy, but that in some sense it was the bridge to a change in the American life-style. As a Connecticut man said, "We need to use the energy issue and the concerns about the environment that are at the heart of this issue to foster the motivation for a radical change in the way we live in this culture." But there remained speculation about whether the American people are willing to make sacrifices. After all, said one participant, "Conservation is against the American religion. It's atheistic. We're just wasteful people because we see that as part of the privilege of being American. To be American means you just get more." A Forum participant in Long Island noted that "We are not going to conserve until it actually hurts us in the pocketbook, until we feel the pinch."

Counting the Cost

Yet 74 percent of the respondents to the posttest could not accept the argument that energy conservation won't work "because Americans will never agree to drive less and pay higher gas prices." So when it came to discussing the different energy options that are available, and the pros and cons of each of these options, and the trade-offs to be contended with in any choice the individual/the government might eventually make, participants focused on the risks and the costs associated with each option. Predominantly, in their consideration of each of the available energy options, participants were assessing the costs in terms of damage to the environment, health risks to the individual, implications for the availability of resources and the quality of life of future generations, and implications for the rest of the world. Eventually, participants argued, we have to assess how much of these risks we, as a society, are willing to live with.

Most participants saw the use of fossil fuels as

causing long-term environmental problems, and that seriously concerned them. About 80 percent strongly agreed that relying on coal, oil, and natural gas for most of our energy means more air pollution and other environmental problems.

True, many expressed the view that, at least in the short term, Americans are not likely to move away from fossil fuels because the immediate benefits of staying with such resources outweigh the immediate costs. As a Connecticut man aptly put it:

> It seems like the core of the argument [in favor of fossil fuels] is, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." The proponents seem to say that we've got the energy now, the environment is livable now — so why resort to risky or untried alternatives now? I've heard a story about a man who fell from a 17-story building and on the way down someone from a lower floor asked him how he was doing. He said, "So far, so good." I think few people would argue to continue our dependence on fossil fuels; but we're not experiencing problems, so there's kind of an unstated psychological commitment to fossil fuels. It might not stand up to intellectual scrutiny, but still it's probably the majority viewpoint.

An apparently knowledgeable man in Long Island pointed out: "The next 50 years, we're still probably going to have to be dependent on fossil fuels." And a man in Indianapolis, reflecting on this energy source, said: "Since we have so much of it, it seems to me we need to invest some more money so that we can make use of it in a more effective way."

Nevertheless, people at the Forums insistently questioned the efficiency of fossil fuel use. As one Long Island woman remarked, "We haven't yet factored in the costs of health care. The consequences of using fossil fuels are very costly in terms of the health of the nation." A man from Indianapolis noted, "I don't think that we can allow this pollution to continue, because, after all, we've only got one atmosphere." And there remained a skepticism about the effectiveness of developing ways to burn coal more cleanly. "You still generate carbon dioxide, no matter how clean," said a man from Indianapolis.

Participants were also concerned about the limited supply of fossil fuels. As one woman from Long Island remarked, "All fossil fuels are of limited supply. We shall find ourselves in another dilemma 10-20 years from now. It is all limited. That should be considered." A woman from Indianapolis echoed concerns shared by many about this generation's responsibility toward future generations: "I feel as though we're using up everything we have, like gas and oil. What about generations to come? They deserve [to be left with] something." Another participant in Connecticut pointed out, "If we take seriously the notion that we have a duty to future generations, then we have to decide whether or not the economic harm of moving away from fossil fuels overrides the environmental harm to future generations."

Most participants did not take kindly to the idea of drilling for more natural gas in national parks, in wildlife areas, or in pristine parts of the country. They saw the price to pay as too high, the danger to the environment as too great. "How much more of the environment can we wipe out?" an Indianapolis woman asked. Prior to participation in the Forums, a high 72 percent of Forum participants had already indicated that they opposed allowing oil exploration and development in protected wilderness areas; this view gained still more adherents in the course of the Forum discussions: on their posttests, 87 percent indicated that they were now less willing to approve of oil exploration in the protected wilderness. Only a small minority of participants seemed willing to live with exploitation of some wildlife areas, and with additional pollution, and nine out of ten people at the discussions were opposed to loosening restrictions on offshore oil drilling as a means of redeeming our dependence on foreign oil.

A man from one of the Indianapolis Forums expressed the general view: "I don't think we should ease restrictions or let up on any efforts to prevent environmental degradation. We need to keep a full-court press on regulations that are protective and incentives for research and using energy alternatives." A majority of the participants (68 percent) favored building cars that are more fuel efficient and pollute less even if they are smaller and less safe. Over 92 percent favored building more fuel-efficient cars even if they are more expensive. And people appeared willing to make some personal sacrifices, though not necessarily without some concomitant public commitment. "I'd give up driving my car to and from work, but I'd have to have some mass transit," one Indiana woman said.

Most participants agreed that because fossil fuels are probably not a long-term option, we should begin phasing in some other alternative, or perhaps a combination of alternatives. They shared the feeling that while there may be no immediate crisis, we should get to work on alternative energy sources now, so that future generations will not have to pay for our inaction. But there was less than certainty about what those alternative energy sources might be, or when they might be available.

The Risks We Are Willing to Live With

If participants were interested in developing alternative energy sources, there were, nevertheless, clear differences over the speed and the nature of any transition: participants in one Forum in Somerville, Massachusetts, felt that the timeline for change could take as long as ten years. Another major concern of Forum

participants contemplating a commitment to alternative, renewable energy sources was about how much we might realistically expect to achieve. "Can this work?" many wondered. Not everyone was convinced that renewable resources could provide the volume of energy we need. As few as 20 percent of participants, overall, believed that in the next 10 years renewable energy sources could, in fact, provide very much of the energy we will need, and concern was generally expressed about the willingness of the American public to go along with a course of action that many may consider "pie in the sky." Nonetheless, Forum participants did see renewable sources as an important source of future energy policies. As one Indiana woman noted, "Even if we don't have enough money to make [this option] work by itself, it can at least be an alternative that can help cut down on using oil and gas."

Asked if they would support increasing government spending to study solar energy, "even if many scientists don't think it will pay off soon," 72 percent of the respondents to the posttest strongly agreed. This represented a marked rise in enthusiasm over the 61 percent who had indicated strong agreement in the pretest — and testimonials from some Forum participants during the discussions, about the effectiveness of solar panels in their homes, may have been responsible for this shift in attitudes.

In general, Forum participants appeared to share the feeling that one component of our energy policy should be a "full-steam-ahead" effort to develop and use renewable sources. As one man from Indianapolis said, "As long as we continue to delay getting into renewable sources, we'll always hear that these options won't be available at competitive prices anytime soon. The future is today, not tomorrow." More than half the Forum participants "strongly disagreed" with the statement that "because there are many problems with renewable energy sources, developing them should not be a top priority right now." Most participants expressed the belief that science and technology can develop renewables; and that, in the process, new jobs and businesses will be developed. Three out of four people who completed the final questionnaire anticipated that renewables will be sufficiently inexpensive for popular use in the near future.

On the other hand, some Forum participants were staunchly opposed to nuclear power, and most of the others agreed that there were major drawbacks to nuclear power as we know it in this country. Their major concern was with the potential for catastrophic accidents. Recalling Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, many people expressed uneasiness about the likely scale of such accidents. And although others in every Forum pointed to France's nuclear record as an indication that nuclear power can be safe, under proper operation and using newer technology than we have here in this country, on the whole, nuclear advocates were a distinct minority at the Forums.

One line of argument for nuclear power was that it provides us with a cleaner energy source — and one that is viable, unlike the renewables, which were referred to as a "fantasy," and fossil fuels, that are associated with high environmental and health costs. Others pointed out that nuclear energy is a prolific source of power, a match for the acute need for energy as nations develop and populations grow. Proponents of nuclear power in the Forums blamed the media for the bad reputation that dogs nuclear power in the U.S. As one Indiana man pointed out, "Nuclear suffers from bad press. No small incident happens without attracting a lot of attention."

These arguments were clearly important in the Forums. Yet there remained one major concern about nuclear power for most if not all the participants: the difficulty in the disposal of nuclear waste. Here, the concern with future generations surfaced strongly. An Indiana man was "astonished to find that it takes 10,000 years for radioactive waste to be safe. That's an unimaginable amount of time . . . 10,000 years," he said. In a similar vein, a participant in a Connecticut Forum said:

> I think we've got to get away from the idea that the human race can produce toxic materials and get away with it. I think nuclear energy generates the most toxic material. The nuclear reactor is the wrong way to go simply because of the amount of toxic waste. We don't need it. We should find other, cleaner ways.

An Indianapolis man gave fellow Forum participants something to think about when he reminded them that "you're talking about making canisters to hold this stuff for 10,000 years. Have we ever made anything to last 10,000 years?" And one young man brought a moment of laughter to a Long Island Forum when he warned of what he called "the 'oops!' factor." Finally, about 70 percent of Forum participants expressed the sentiment that nuclear power will always be too risky, no matter how strictly regulated by the government.

Although nuclear power has less polluting effects than, for example, fossil fuels, that fact did not diminish in any way most participants' opposition to it. Even when asked whether we should build more nuclear plants because they do not contribute to the greenhouse effect, 53 percent of the participants strongly disagreed, with women more opposed to the idea (66 percent) than men (41 percent). When asked how they would balance the possibility of a nuclear accident or waste spillage against the environmental damage from fossil fuels, many participants pointed out that they would rather live with the effects of fossil fuels. As one Indiana woman said, "You have days in L.A. where you cannot go outside and breathe the air. But at least there is another day to look forward to."

There were others, however, who, although they did not necessarily welcome nuclear power, nevertheless preferred its drawbacks to those of fossil fuels. "A nuclear accident would wipe out a bunch of people. But with fossil fuels, if you destroy the atmosphere, you wipe out everyone."

Reflecting, finally, on the alternatives that the Forum had discussed, a young woman in a Long Island Forum observed: "We can sit here and hash out the pluses and the minuses of all these options; but there isn't going to be one that is pleasing to us." To which a man responded: "There is no such thing as a risk-free society; and the question really comes down to how much of a risk we are willing to take. How much is acceptable?"

A Pervasive Mistrust

Several participants admitted that their intense fear of nuclear power might be due to the scarcity of accurate information about this source of energy. As one man in a Long Island Forum noted: "There is not enough public participation or knowledge about the issue. The only information I can get is what I read in the newspaper. But they don't write a lot about it." And despite fairly widespread opposition to nuclear energy, many Forum participants favored investing in more research in this area to develop safer and cleaner ways to dispose of the radioactive waste (if "for no other reason than to figure out what to do when it starts leaking out," as one participant said), and to develop better nuclear power generation technologies. "We need to figure out a way to get rid of it permanently or use it again," said one Indiana Forum participant. A Forum participant in Long Island noted, "The question is how to dispose of the waste. I don't think enough money has been put into finding the best way of dealing with it." Another Connecticut Forum participant agreed:

> We have to spend whatever money we have, even if it's remedial. Remedial research could be the leap that's going to all of a sudden find the package to put it in. We certainly can't turn our back on this industry or we're really going to have a hell of a problem. We just haven't got a good handle on it, that's all.

Yet although many participants supported technological development in the nuclear energy field, distrust for this source of energy remained pervasive. What was clear in all of these discussions of the nuclear alternative, however, was that the heart of the problem lies not in the technology, but in the little faith people have in the institutions responsible for nuclear power plant safety — the government and industry. A woman in Somerville acknowledged: "We've lost faith in regulatory agencies. If we can have more faith in management and government, we might be more open to supporting nuclear power." But a woman in a Long Island Forum noted, "We don't even dispose of medical waste properly. I don't trust government enough to regulate this [nuclear waste]." Another Forum participant remarked: "There is no way that I'd trust my future and that of my family to the government regulating nuclear waste." People were also seriously skeptical about enforcement. As one Indiana man put it, "The problem has so far been not with the regulations, but with the enforcement of the regulations." A Long Island Forum participant noted that "no matter how wonderful the regulations are, the human element comes in and doesn't pay attention to the regulations. I don't trust humans to follow regulations." This distrust may explain why 70 percent of respondents expressed their reluctance to accept nuclear power as a safe and reliable source of energy even if government safety standards were strictly enforced, with women being more uneasy on this score than men.

But the sense of mistrust was a recurring motif in these energy discussions; it did not arise merely when the subject was nuclear waste. Participants clearly expressed an urge to move forward on the energy issue; yet they indicated that they find it difficult to make specific energy policy decisions because there is too much conflicting information. The source of the conflict did not appear to be incomplete information or lack of scientific knowledge, so much as the way in which information is used. Mistrust was pervasive — mistrust of government, of the corporate world, of professionals, of special interests, all of whom, it was suggested, advance various "truths" to serve political agendas. When discussing the health hazards of fossil fuels, an Indianapolis man found:

> It's hard to determine what the health risks are. There are so many conflicting stories from those who want to eliminate the use of fossil fuels and from those who want to promote them. It's so discouraging to hear different figures batted around, and they're so far apart. We really don't know who is telling us the truth. I'm skeptical of government figures, but I'm skeptical as well of people to the far left environmentally, because they're also promoting what they want to see. So I'm not sure what the health risks really are.

A small number of participants indicated their conviction that the government is not informing the public of all its options because of the pressure brought by corporate, economic interest groups that oppose any effort to change the status quo when it comes to energy consumption. A Connecticut man put the case like this:

> I think that we're going to have to confront the power of corporate interests. It's almost as though there exists this silent or separate govern-

ment that controls how the economy is going to operate, whether we want it to be that way or not. Lee Iacocca and friends are going to say, "We cannot create a car that is going to run on less gas without creating a dangerous car." And we can't generate electricity without burning coal. They're going to do this for purely economic reasons. As long as we don't have control over that fact, I don't think things are going to change.

The government is viewed as falling under the pressure of these economic interests. A Long Island woman pointed out that "our tax policy does not support alternative energy, but encourages developing our present energy sources." "Petroleum, politics, and pollution," she said, "the three run together." Another woman remarked, "If we have a government whose main purpose is to help business, the government won't provide the education needed so that the public is informed of [alternative] energy sources." "An uninformed public," she added, "won't be able to make educated decisions."

In Forum discussions of conservation there was strong opposition to government interventions through higher fuel taxes. And again, among the different rationales advanced for this opposition, prominent was the sense that money is mismanaged by the Congress. An Indianapolis woman said:

> I think we could do this conservation without any taxes. We have all kinds of money that is being terribly mismanaged. Every time the Congress wants something, they get it. But every time the public wants something, Congress wants to raise taxes. I just think that they need to get their priorities right.

There were other objections as well: higher fuel taxes would impose burdens especially on the poor and would be unfair and ineffective; government would not use these increased revenues to encourage conservation, research, and mass transit development — although, as a Long Island Forum participant put it, "I could live with conservation if we have a leadership that makes it relevant for us. If they increase the price of gasoline and use the money for research and improving mass transit, I think we could live with the higher prices." An examination of posttest responses shows that after the Forum discussions, people were split in their attitudes toward higher gasoline taxes: 51 percent of the participants endorsed raising the gasoline tax by 50 cents a gallon in order to encourage less gas consumption, while 47 percent opposed it, and the discussions revealed that this disagreement is due mainly to a distrust in the government's serious intentions about conservation.

The sense of mistrust when these Forums discussed energy was broad and deep — and it led directly to a call for a new kind of leadership. A Connecticut man noted that "a precursor to all of this talk about policy and motivation is the need for our national leadership to recognize that [an energy problem] exists."

Moral Leadership and a National Energy Policy

During the discussions, participants proposed various ideas about ways to reduce energy use, both individually and as a community. These ideas included requiring higher energy efficiency standards on housing, carpooling, or creating better mass transit systems, and building bicycle parking lots. And although there were disagreements over the nature of government interventions, there was, nonetheless, a shared sense that there needed to be some. Most participants stressed that the drive toward conservation should start at the grass roots level, but all of them agreed that any voluntary and public effort would have to be directed by a national policy to be set by the government. One participant called for "an energy Czar." A Connecticut man commented, "We need a national energy policy . . . to provide a kind of a roadmap. Some kind of broad policy that will at least jumpstart a debate, something for people to attack or support." "It's a broad-spectrum problem," said a Long Island man, "that no industry, no school, no educational institution can address without the help of government." A Connecticut woman commented: "It will take popular support, a grass roots effort. The national government should be involved, but we should be building support at the local level to back it up, to implement it." And another woman in a Connecticut Forum believed that we have to start by defining our goals: "We must ask ourselves, 'What kind of world do we want to live in?' and assess our options on the basis of that question."

The environment, seen as the most important dimension of the energy issue, is a problem that crosses the boundaries of political maps or terms of office as perhaps no other problem can. It apparently preoccupied the Forums because the success or failure of our struggle to deal with it will markedly affect the next generation. So the Forums echoed a clearly recognized, powerful call for a responsible long-term national energy policy, complemented by grass roots efforts.

For example, in discussing the transition from fossil fuels to alternative sources of energy, including renewables, Forum participants acknowledged that it would be difficult, particularly on poor people who do not have the resources to make the necessary changes. Hence a government role in aiding the transition was seen as unavoidable. Again, some participants in a Forum in Pomfret, Connecticut, noted that up till now, each new fuel has increased convenience of users and decreased their expenses. The move toward renewables reverses

that trend; hence the group saw the need for government intervention to facilitate the change. Invariably, Forum participants agreed that government must take a leading role if the nation is to move away from fossil fuels, better to serve the overriding goal of environmental protection. As one Indianapolis man said, "We have a lot of power companies and oil companies that are making a lot of money on the way things are. We have to provide them with an incentive to make their money in alternative energy sources, make it more attractive to switch."

Another area that Forum participants generally marked for government intervention was in setting clear priorities and investing in technological development, communications, and education. A Connecticut woman argued that:

> ... the issue is commitment. Just a general commitment in the country to be concerned about energy. A commitment where the imagination is backed up by media exposure and education for everybody is what it will take.

Participants argued also that the general public needs to be educated about the renewable sources of energy and informed accurately of their long-term benefits and shortcomings as well. Only then, they said, will the public be in a better position to make its choice.

Similarly, participants did favor interventions such as imposing more regulations or providing tax incentives for people to conserve. For example, 76 percent of the Forum participants were willing to tolerate more government rules and "red tape" aimed at making new homes and home appliances energy efficient. The discussions here were fueled by the belief that people will not conserve unless they see an advantage to themselves. As a woman in a Somerville Forum remarked, "We should use the self-interest and go for tax incentives. People will conserve if it is going to benefit them." Participants also agreed that we need a strong education campaign to teach people about the benefits of conservation and ways to conserve — and that it is government's responsibility to mount such a campaign. A Long Island Forum participant noted:

> The American people have a feeling that we're better and deserve more than anybody else in the world. I think we have to have leadership from government. But we have a president who can go about on a motorboat: we see him on television — and that's the image people have.

A woman in another Long Island Forum had this to say:

> I truly believe that if you educate someone and convince them of the advantages of conservation, they'll do it. Maybe not immediately. For the short-term, you need to give people incentives to conserve. But education has got to be a factor in all of this. It is the government's responsibility to reach the masses.

To which a fellow participant responded:

> If we got a General Schwartzkopf to get up with a couple of American flags and say, "It's patriotic to save energy," probably about 85 percent would now become energy conservers.

The urgent need for the government to prevent any further environmental damages also resonated through all the discussions. Hence participants strongly supported trying renewable resources in tandem with conservation and reduced fossil fuel use. They also favored spending more money on research into renewable energy sources, as well as the pursuit of any other path that might help us reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Most participants expressed willingness to conserve in different ways and favored some kinds of government intervention, such as tax credits, to encourage conservation. Many participants endorsed a tax increase on gasoline, although only if the resulting funds were earmarked and used for environmental improvement or conservation (and the sizable opposition to a tax increase, it will be remembered, was on the grounds that the economic problems we are suffering from are not due to lack of funds but to mismanagement of resources by the government). Participants also expressed the need for more objective information: discussions like those at these Forums, they argued, are a more reliable source of information than the media. Interestingly, people in the Forums looked toward the government and not the media for information.

The public voice heard during these discussions was a responsible voice that reflected a deep concern over our energy consumption; but it voiced a need for national leadership, political leadership, to marshal ongoing efforts to promote better ways of using energy. In this context, a relatively young man in Somerville, Massachusetts, nostalgically remembered Jimmy Carter in his sweater; and a Long Island woman affirmed, "There has to be government leadership. When Jimmy Carter got on television, declaring war on energy waste, that filtered right down to the schools." People had found themselves wrestling in these Forums with an issue that they discovered concerned them deeply. They professed themselves ready for action upon it. But sometimes wistfully, unsure of themselves without leadership. As a high school student in Indianapolis said:

> My generation doesn't know there's an energy crisis. Who decides when it's a concern? I don't. We don't.

ENERGY OPTIONS:

A Response from the Media and from Capitol Hill

Tim Wirth: *This issue is a wonderful metaphor. In that discussion, you have all of the things we've been talking about in addition to others. You have a lack of a sense of emergency about this changing world. We're going totally into a different world and yet we're viewing it from a prism that is a little bit smug and 1970s, not 2010. You have a lack of leadership, coming, I think, from the White House, in terms of the direction of where we're going — which is also true of everything else we've been talking about. You have an environmental crisis exploding upon the planet and we in the U.S., who ought to be acting around the world as a leader, are dragging our heels instead. You have just about everything written into that wonderful discussion right here about energy.*

Frank Sesno: *We also have a remarkable example of how far the public has moved on this. The public knows. People know. All of us here in Washington — the media, the politicians — are mired into this old discussion of black and white, and what we're going to do after the fact. The public knows that we need to be doing something more and that we can be doing something more. They're smart. They're awake. What does it take to raise gasoline tax 5 cents a gallon when we're paying less in real terms than we paid 20 years ago?*

Joseph Lieberman: *There is real good news here. The public voice understands that we've got to change energy policy and environmental policy. They're way ahead of the leadership on this one. They're way ahead of the product of the leadership. And part of the problem with the leadership in the Congress is that energy policy and environmental policy involve change. Change hurts people. Change hurts interests that are established. Those interests fight back and they're well represented in Congress. And often they stand in the way of that change occurring. Let me tell you something. I think all of us who are political, and even not political, and who go out to schools and talk to our kids — we know that if the grown-ups today understand that there has to be a change on energy and environmental policy, our kids understand it a hundred times over. They're not going to tolerate the old ways and the lack of leadership when it comes to energy and environment anymore.*

Dan Yankelovich: *Of the three subjects discussed by the groups, there was more change in the before and after on the energy discussions than on the other two. When they begin to discuss it, they begin to become interested in it and realize how much change is needed — which is a wonderful opportunity for leadership. Because what the group says is that people are ready to be very forthcoming and far-reaching on an energy policy but the leadership has to be there to take that potential and bring it to life and to articulate it. If ever I've seen something that is ready for leadership, this issue is it.*

David Mathews: *Remember these are not people on the street corner. These are not* unlike *the people who would pass on a street corner, but these are people who took a couple of hours to sit down for a serious discusssion and to look at the hard choices they'd have to make. And what we found is that when people began the discussions, they tended to think of energy as a problem but not a crisis. They didn't have the sense of urgency that you saw on the Senate floor. After they talked with each other for a couple of hours, they were much more willing to think of it as a crisis. Much more willing to support policies that made for a more rapid transition away from business-as-usual energy policies. But only on second thoughts. The real question in this situation is not only is there enough leadership, but are there enough opportunities for people to come to some second thoughts?*

Ellen Goodman: *There is a risk assessment going on here. Everybody knows that. But they don't know what that is. They don't know what the best balance is. So there is a chance here for truly disinterested information. There is also a tremendous amount of highly interested misinformation that is going on, and I think again there is the sense that money is going into the argument by going into the political process.*

David Gergen: *It seems to me that given the public willingness now and understanding that we need to move on energy, one of the failings of both our politicians and our press is that we too quickly squelch conversations that might be serious. Tim talked about the lack of leadership from the White House and the failure to come to grips with some of the energy questions. I think that point is well taken. But I'd also say that when Paul Tsongas went out to campaign on some energy issues as a Democrat, in Democratic primaries, when he tried to talk about nuclear power, he had his head taken off.*

Frank Sesno: *By whom?*

David Gergen: *By his opposition. The politicians here are unwilling to talk about this in a rational way. You cannot have, in politics today, a rational discussion about gasoline taxes. We're talking about a nickle a gallon and we debate about that. The Germans went and put on a 70 cents a gallon increase, like that, to help pay for reunification. Paul Tsongas lost in Colorado over the nuclear question. You're not going to be able to solve these problems and get a policy if people cannot even get ideas on the table. That's why we cannot have a rational debate about Social Security in this country. Because it suddenly becomes an opportunity for demagoguery by the people who oppose it.*

Bill Gray: *One of the real problems that we face in leadership today is what I call "risk-takers" versus "win-takers." People who are willing to take a risk, step out, stay out there with the point as long as it takes, develop a dialogue, get into that public and have that dialogue going — as opposed to those whom I call "win-takers" — which is, "what way the poll is going, what is the immediate reaction two days after the event or after the announcement?" One of the problems that I have is this: how does a member of the Senate or of the Congress, or even the president of the United States, get a platform where they can have a prolonged debate about substance without somebody producing on that night, or the next morning, the poll says — right now — that 70 percent of the people don't like the idea of a gasoline tax, when they haven't even heard the reasons about why, what would it be used for, what would it mean for the long-term economic growth of this country. I've often said that if Harry Truman had tried to institute the Marshall Plan in 1992, he'd have a real big problem because he couldn't get that platform to have that discussion. And that was a very unpopular act at that time. One of the problems that I am picking out is that the public is often way ahead of us on a lot of issues. But they don't get a rational debate and discussion and as a result they end up making choices or pushing in one way or another without having that long debate like the one we're talking about on energy.*

Ellen Goodman: *In New Hampshire, there was a real serious debate about things that the people participated in. People went to two, three forums, and they were engaged and interested. And then that campaign got blown up on character issues.*

Frank Sesno: *We saw a discussion — granted it was preceded by a couple of hours of discussion to bring people along — where citizens really showed us that they were well informed, well aware of the threats that were out there, well aware of the choices and well aware of the sacrifices that we, as a people, might have to make. The energy issue could well be a metaphor for the deficit, for race relations in this country, for any number of issues. I'd be interested to hear from you, who work down there in the well, how you think. How could we harness that awareness and that reasonableness and give back to the public voice this kind of discussion and debate that they seem to want?*

John Chafee: *I was very interested in what the young woman had to say there when she was talking about nuclear power and she said the problem with nuclear power is that we don't have a system of disposing of the nuclear waste. That's something that the Congress of the United States just hasn't stepped up and handled, dealt with. They're afraid they're going to offend some voters in Nevada.*

Tom Coleman: *I have seen a rise of partisanship over these issues. The first issue we talked about was foreign policy and domestic policy in that context. The President floated those ideas and he was immediately bashed by somebody from the other party. Just recently, it has been done again. Sometimes, it seems to be just for partisan sake — like there is some great tote board in this town where all these points are added up and the public is supposed to understand it: some of us are good guys, some of us are bad guys, and the good guys are supposed to win in the elections. But if we had more bipartisanship, or even nonpartisanship, we could get these things done. We could determine our role in the world.*

Bill Gray: *I am not bashing the press. I am saying they've got the right to respond and report what is out there. What I am talking about is something much more fundamental than what the press reports or what Dan [Yankelovich] does — which is important and they've got to do it. What I'm talking about is the willingness of the leadership to take a point and move out there, stay out there with it. We've become so partisan that immediately people are attacked for reasons that don't have anything to do with the substance of their arguments sometimes. But I don't think partisanship is the problem. You had a partisan country in 1948 when we were debating the Marshall Plan. You had a partisan country in the 1960s when we were debating civil rights in this country. That's not the problem. What I think I hear out there — as one who used to be inside and now is outside — I hear people wanting to hear a substantive debate about the options. And that can be partisan. There's nothing wrong with the Republicans saying this is our part, the Democrats saying this is ours. But they want a substantive debate that makes some sense, treats them intelligently.*

Tom Coleman: *They want a debate, Bill, but they also want some action. What the public is frustrated with is that they see this as a debating society, a lot of rhetoric, but they don't see any real action.*

Bill Gray: *The fundamental reality is that people don't listen to you. I've got bad news for you. They're not*

listening because they don't even think the debate that we have on the floor is worthwhile. Clearly there is a consensus out there among the American people; and what needs to be done is somebody having the wherewithal to step out, articulate it, move in a direction, and understand that they're going to be attacked. If the president, for example, believes it is in the national interest to provide economic aid to the Soviet Union, then step out there, debate it, convince the American people — just as he convinced the American people about the need to stop Saddam Hussein. (And he did a very good job on that issue, even though I was on the other side when I was in there.) But that's the kind of thing I'm talking about. And that's true about foreign policy. And that need is there for the public voice on the issue of energy policy as well.

Tim Wirth: *It is the president's responsibility, in large part, to go out and frame this debate and lay these issues out there. I mean he's the only person who can reach to everybody in the country.*

THE BOUNDARIES OF FREE SPEECH: HOW FREE IS TOO FREE?

THE BOUNDARIES OF FREE SPEECH: HOW FREE IS TOO FREE?

A Report on the Outcomes of the National Issues Forums

When the topic is freedom of speech, the debate has a familiar format: those who decry the harmful effects of the speech — whether it be a museum display of homoerotic photographs, or records with racist or anti-gay lyrics, or pornography that dehumanizes women, or "political correctness" on a college campus, or the desire of neo-Nazis to march through a neighborhood of concentration camp survivors — confront those who protect what they see as a greater good by defending the rights of anyone to say virtually anything, save "Fire!" in a crowded theater.

"The public, Sir, is a Great Beast!" Alexander Hamilton is reported to have said. And according to many civil libertarians today, nowhere is the public more "beastlike" than on the issue of freedom of speech. Those holding this view argue that public opinion, ignorant or indifferent to the dangers of precedence, represents a clear and ever present danger to the Bill of Rights; they cite as warning the recent desire to outlaw the burning of the American flag, even if that meant rewriting the First Amendment.

Others, however, hold an opposite view. The United States has become, according to these critics, an "anything goes" society where it has become impossible for average citizens to escape an ever-increasing cascade of pornographic, violent, and offensive expression in the movies, on television, and now, on the college campus. The public's virtually insatiable appetite for sex and violence is, according to those holding this view, largely to blame, with offensive expression eroding our family values so much that the U.S. is morally rotting from within.

Yet the National Issues Forums held this past fall and winter suggest that both of these views about public opinion are incomplete, misleading and, in many respects, in error. Rather than having straightforward, one-dimensional views about the boundaries of free speech, the citizens who attended these Forums worried deeply about the precedents that any restriction would set. At the same time, they expressed grave concern about the effects of sexually explicit, violent, and offensive expression on society in general, and especially on its younger people. In the discussions, most participants tried mightily to strike a balance between what they saw as two competing social values, both of them commanding: aiming to maximize free expression while minimizing its socially disruptive consequences. The public's views, as evidenced in these Forums, certainly did not reflect a jaded, amoral, indifferent people; yet while they might not be identical to those of the confirmed civil libertarian, they were far from the opinions of an ignorant, reactionary beast.

Sex and Violence and the Nation's Moral Fiber

Again and again, the participants in these Forums, from Cleveland, Mississippi, to Davis, California, complained about the level of sex and violence in the movies and on television. "Our movies are filled with excessive violence," said a woman from Orange County. "As many as 40 or 50 people shot down in one movie — this is ridiculous!" One man complained about "slasher" films in which pretty girls, often wearing nothing but a T-shirt and panties, were stabbed, chopped, strangled, or otherwise mutilated by the killer in a hockey mask or with razor blades for fingernails. "The other night I was watching TV after eight o'clock with my two-and-a-half-year-old son," said a man from one of two Forums in Orange County, California. "My wife came in and said, 'What are you doing?' I started paying attention to the violence and I realized that it's not fit for him to watch, even at two-and-a-half."

Some participants were critical even of local news. "If we're going to start limiting violent material," said a man from Cleveland, Mississippi, "you're going to have to start putting the six o'clock news on a little later. They are the most violent shows on television. They show people being shot, dead bodies, car crashes — they show more than most network programs."

Indeed, in questionnaires filled out before the Forums began, enormous majorities said that over the past decade, they thought there had been an increase in the amount of violence (89 percent) and sexually explicit material (90 percent) on TV. Women attending the Forums were especially likely to feel that violence has increased, with 96 percent of them expressing this view, compared to 81 percent among men.

A number of participants said that public opinion and the free enterprise system were at the heart of the problem. "We live in a country that, if you label something 'X-rated,' it becomes a best-seller," said a California woman. A man from Davis, California, said, "Companies exist to make money. It's our problem that we've raised our kids to buy '2 Live Crew' instead of good books."

A number of participants said excessive sex and violence on TV and in the movies has led to a climate of permissiveness, and an erosion of the moral fabric of society. In the questionnaire participants filled out after

the Forums, participants agreed by a margin of 54 percent to 30 percent that "pornography leads to the breakdown of morals." A man from Orange County said, "I think we need to learn from other societies. We need to look at what happened to the Roman Empire and to Sodom and Gomorrah. The fall of great countries [because of moral decay] has happened before, and it can happen again." A woman from Orange County said, "Twenty years ago, we said, 'How much worse can it get?' And we're saying now, 'How much worse can it get?' I hate to think about it." A man from Irvine, California, suggested that such material is not necessarily protected by the First Amendment. "I don't think [the Founding Fathers] dreamed for a moment that we would have a surge in pornography and explicitly violent material like we've seen lately," he said.

In every Forum, someone observed that the changing nature of the family compounds the problem. With so many single parents and dual-wage-earner households, participants said, today's parents cannot closely supervise what their children are exposed to. A man from Orange County said, "You have a lot of families where both parents are out working. And when they come home, they're probably too preoccupied to monitor some of the things taking place [on television]." A woman from Cleveland, Mississippi, said, "The family has just broken down." A woman from Panama City, Florida, said:

> You can't turn on TV today for a six-year-old child without [coming across] something violent, something that could very well shape that child's outlook on life. And [this] at a time when, with families today, the mother and father have to be out of the home [working] every day, and can't oversee what their children watch.

Yet Forum participants were split about whether watching violence actually causes people to commit violent acts. After hearing fellow participants make pro and con arguments during the Forums, 41 percent in the closing questionnaire said today's violent movies have "a lot of effect" in causing people to commit violent crimes. (Women in particular felt this way with 47 percent of them agreeing compared to 33 percent among male participants.)

Some argued that violence in the movies and on TV can trigger violence by leading people to carry out what a Mississippi woman called copycat crimes — particularly gruesome murders identical to ones recently on television, in the movies, or on the news. Others argued there was a connection between such material and domestic violence, especially violence against women. A Panama City, Florida, woman said, "Some of those things on TV are motivators for people who are just on the edge of committing a crime or a rape or whatever. They're motivators for people without a level head; it sparks them on." Again, sexually explicit materials "can lead to violence," a woman from Florida said. "Sometimes people have impulses that are dormant. Ideas are given to them by this type of material. The material triggers it." A man from Davis, California, said, "If you're walking in the rain, it's only reasonable to assume you're going to get wet. By that I mean, if you're constantly inundated with violence and sex and pornography and so on — hey, you can't expect angels to come out of the other end of the gauntlet."

But many were *not* persuaded that violence on TV or the movies leads adults to commit violent crimes, or that the country's crime rate is largely the result of sex and violence in the media. In the closing questionnaire, a full 60 percent said that violent movies have little or no effect. A man from Cleveland, Mississippi, said, "Yes, juvenile delinquency is a problem. And alcohol and child abuse and juvenile crime. But I don't think we can attribute them to a lack of censorship." A man from Orange County said, "There's a big question whether the violent programs kids see on TV are the cause of the violence they get into, or whether the conditions they live under are the major cause." Many agreed with a man from Panama City who said:

> People need to take responsibility for their own actions and stop blaming them on other things. Whether you act out what you see [in a violent movie] depends on what you have inside, what you have in your heart. And those depend on how you were raised, what you were taught, how the things that evolved in your life as you were growing up were explained or presented to you.

A few participants, indeed, appeared to think that the idea of a causal relationship was ridiculous. A Panama City man mimicked an imaginary murderer, saying, "Rock music made me do it! I listened to rock music when I was young, and that's what made me go out and kill someone!" A man from Orange County said, "Caligula and his society did some pretty weird stuff without watching television. I don't know if it makes much difference whether Jeffrey Dahmer watched 'The Brady Bunch' or 'Bugs Bunny.' " Another man in that group said that "When kids are two-years-old, they'd kill each other for a cookie. It's not TV — people have to be socialized. We wouldn't be here tonight, concerned about this issue, if we weren't socialized."

A mother from Orange County ended one Forum by suggesting we should not underestimate our children's ability to draw distinctions:

> My son grew up with *Star Wars*. All the spaceships with lasers, destroying planets, the whole thing. I wasn't always sure that he could differentiate, that he knew it was pretend. I wondered if I was going to raise a mass murderer!

When he was nine, I rented the movie, *Places in the Heart*. It's about a family trying to make it in Texas during the depression. Despite some adultery — which I kind of zipped through on fast forward — I thought overall there were strong family values. At the end of the movie, the Ku Klux Klan goes after Danny Glover, who plays a wonderful character. My son jumped off the couch, went into the bathroom and vomited. I still quiver when I think about it. He was crying and carrying on about the violence to Danny Glover. I said, "Nick, since you were five, you've watched every planet in the universe get blown up. Why is this so disturbing?" "Mom," he said, "that was make-believe. This is real."

What to Do About It?

In the Forums, participants considered what to do about what they saw as expression that is excessively violent, erotic, or otherwise offensive. They discussed government censorship: a ban or some other kind of direct government regulation of what is generally felt to be the most obnoxious kinds of expression.

They considered the possibilities of private measures: labeling records that have racist or anti-gay lyrics; using a rating system for movies; restricting the hours when certain shows are on TV; making sure that pornographic magazines are kept out of sight at the newsstand or where children will be exposed to them; refusing to admit those under 18 to sexually explicit movies; writing letters to influence TV executives, etc. And they faced the fact that to a degree at least, being exposed to offensive expression is part of the price of living in a free society.

By and large, in all these Forums, participants resisted anything resembling widespread government regulation. In the posttest, only 3 percent wanted to ban magazines like *Playboy* or *Penthouse*; only 8 percent approved a ban on records with violent or sexually explicit lyrics; and only small minorities favored banning very violent (13 percent) or sexually explicit movies (10 percent). When asked more generally if laws should be used "to defend ourselves against offensive messages," participants in the posttest said no, by a margin of 61 to 39 percent.

Some participants opposed government bans because they felt they could handle the situation themselves. A woman from Panama City, Florida, said, "I don't think [anyone] should tell me what books I can read or what movie I can watch. Or allow my daughter to watch. I feel confident enough as a parent that whatever I allow her to watch, I can explain to her in a rational way so that she'll know that's not real, that's not the way life is."

Many more in the Forums held to this view, however, because of a declared lack of confidence in the government; and this lack of trust — in leadership and government generally — was a continuing undertone in these Forums. A man in an Orange County Forum said, "If the politicians and the bureaucrats can't run the economy, how can they define what would be appropriate language for people to express themselves?" Another man said, "I don't trust the government to be able to tell me what I can and cannot say." A woman from one of the Forums in Orange County said, "As a parent, having violence and sex on television, especially in the hours that I'm not as available [to oversee what my children watch], is offensive to me. However, I don't feel that the government should say we can't watch that [program]." "Government is such a blunt instrument," added another.

Still others worried about setting a precedent. A man from Cleveland, Mississippi, said:

> If you start the ball rolling toward censorship, pretty soon you'll have Chaucer, Shakespeare, and J. D. Salinger and other authors who, throughout the years, have been found by certain groups to be offensive for one political reason or another. Once you start the snowball rolling toward censorship, there's no telling what it might lead to.

A woman from Cleveland, Mississippi, argued that a ban could have even more terrifying consequences. "Who's going to police it?" she asked. "Are we going to turn into Big Brother? Are you going to start turning in your neighbors because they played some sexually explicit music or had some literature that you found out about?"

A man from Davis, California, suggested that speech can be unpopular for political reasons:

> Talking about civil rights in 1959 and 1960 was not a healthy thing to do in this country. I went to jail for standing up and talking about things. In the 1960s, talking against the war in Vietnam [led to] the same thing: we were spit on, everything happened to us. Most of the progressive things in our society were not looked upon at the time as something decent to talk about.

And again, the same discussion suggested that the government is overly sensitive to the political winds.

> The problem I have is that normally the public is way ahead of the government. The government is much more conservative. Normally, what happens is that the public sees behavior and either they like it or don't like it, and they move forward. The government usually passes laws. We don't have, as is often said, a government that is out front. The government normally sticks its finger in the air and says, "Which way should I

> go before the next election?" I don't like the idea of relying on them to sort out the trends; they're just not real good at it.

For most participants, ultimately, labeling, voluntary restrictions, and community pressure were the only remedies they found acceptable. A woman from Orange County said, "I'm very comfortable with restricting certain hours when things can be shown [on TV]. But I'm uncomfortable with someone saying, 'You can't watch it at all.'" A man from Davis, California, said, "I don't have a problem with labeling, be it sexually explicit lyrics or whatever. But I do have a problem with banning, when you mean not even allowing access to it. As long as [records] are labeled, it's up to the discretion of the individual, or the parents of the individual — which is where [the choice] should be." A California woman said, "As long as the parent has the option to say, 'Okay, turn the channel,' things are all right. Free speech can be too free, but I don't want other people to decide for me [what is too much]."

Another reason participants opposed government action was the feeling that they, as consumers, had the potential to influence companies that sponsor what they consider to be offensive shows. In one of the Davis Forums, a woman said, "For the parent whose child watches Saturday morning cartoons and thinks they're horrible and wants an alternative — I don't know what channel you could have your child turn to. But you could start enough of a writing campaign with other parents to get that channel to change some of the things that are [put on the air]. It may take a lot more effort than if the government would censor it, but that sort of thing could be done." A woman from Irvine, California, agreed, saying, "It takes people to follow through. It's not as simple as not watching that X-rated Jordache commercial. I, as a person, need to write Jordache and tell them I'm unhappy and that my kids will never wear their jeans because of that exploitation." A man from Orange County suggested that people could vote with their pocketbook, saying, "If you don't like violent movies, don't go see them."

However, others argued that regulation by the private sector was an absurd notion, saying the private sector was responding to public opinion, that more sex and violence was what the public wanted, and that that was the heart of the problem. When asked why there was so much sex and violence on television and the movies, a woman from Orange County, California, said, "It all comes down to the profit motive. If there's money to be made from it, [sex and violence] will be on the air." A man from Davis said, "*Terminator 2* made $200 million. That's a lot of people going to see it." A Mississippi man said, "You've got that 'Justify My Love' video by Madonna — even MTV refused to carry it. As a result, she sold more of those things than any other thing she's ever done." A Cleveland, Mississippi, man agreed, saying, "Sex sells! If they took the sex out of shows like 'Dallas,' what would you have left?"

When it came to comedians whose material is often considered offensive, large numbers wanted to judge the issue on a case-by-case basis. Only 5 percent favored an outright ban on "comedians doing sexually explicit or racially offensive shows in clubs," while 64 percent favored private restrictions and 34 percent favored no restrictions at all.

Asked about an exhibition of homoerotic photographs, many participants sharply distinguished between permitting such material to be shown and supporting it through government-funded grants. "Do we actually have to fund free speech that is offensive to the community? If someone wants to paint things that are offensive to most people in America, that's his business. But the government shouldn't pay for it!" said a woman from Cleveland, Mississippi.

Hateful or Offensive Speech: The Intent to Hurt

As well as sex and violence on television and in the movies, participants considered issues related to a wide variety of what could be called hateful speech, including the following:

- Groups like the Ku Klux Klan marching or appearing on TV;
- The use of racist, sexist, anti-gay, or anti-Semitic language, especially on college campuses;
- Sexual harassment of women.

After the Forums, a solid majority, 57 percent, agreed that "racist, sexist, anti-gay, or other intolerant expression" has increased over the past ten years. Women (70 percent), those aged 50 or older (73 percent), and black and Hispanic participants (68 percent) were most likely to feel this way.

Nonetheless, in most cases, Forum participants felt that in a free country, even abhorrent speech must be tolerated at least to some extent. A woman from Cleveland, Mississippi, said:

> I find the things the Nazis stand for offensive. Really, I would prefer that we not have anyone who believes in Nazism. The swastika inspires fear in people. But if I make a law against displaying swastikas, they can turn around and say, "We don't like that album you played the other day. You can't play that anymore." [Censorship] boomerangs back on you.

A black woman from Irvine, California, said, "Being a minority, I'd rather have [the Nazis] talk about their hate on cable TV or on campus so I can hear them. I'd rather have that than have them underground until one day, Hitler is in our face." A Mississippi man agreed

that free speech has a price. "A girl the other day, without knowing [my beliefs], made some derogatory remarks about my religion," he said. "Although I found it offensive, she has the right to say what she said." After the Forums, participants agreed by a margin of 66 to 29 percent that "restrictions on free speech by anyone threaten our commitment to protecting minority views." Only 20 percent wanted to ban groups like the Klan from having their own cable TV show.

People drew a line at speech that led to violence, in effect, agreeing with the Supreme Court's dictum that people have no right to shout "Fire!" in a crowded theater when there is no fire. "With Aryan Nation or the KKK, their speech is designed to lead directly to action. The action [intended from that speech] has to be judged in [deciding] whether the speech should be limited or not," said a man from Davis, California.

Participants also talked about controversies on college campuses, and for many, the campus was the one place where speech should be inviolate and expression most free. A woman from Cleveland, Mississippi, said:

> When we start talking about college speech codes, we are lending ourselves to the idea that there are correct and incorrect things to say. College campuses should have freedom of expression, if anywhere should. When we start concerning ourselves with making sure that everyone has correct speech, people will become less expressive. Part of the college experience is learning about even the most extreme points of view.

But not everyone agreed. A strong minority (26 percent in these Forums, overall) said there should be a ban on male students verbally harassing women or shouting obscene words on a college campus. A woman from Orange County said there was good reason why such speech should not be tolerated. "I would remind you," she said, "that 200 years ago, Native Americans, blacks, and women were not even part of the Constitution. They had no right to vote, they were nonpeople." A California man agreed, saying the country's history of racial and sexual discrimination made it imperative that groups that were victims in the past receive protection against old prejudices today. A woman from Davis was torn about what to do. "I hate myself for saying this," she said, "because I thought I believed in free speech, unlimited speech on campus, and stuff like that. But I would probably vote for shutting up any group that promoted violence against minority groups."

A man from Cleveland, Mississippi, suggested that offensive or politically correct speech can cut both ways. "So far we've focused on what would be called 'right-wing' issues," he said. "But the 'left-wing' are sometimes guilty of this, too. With the politically correct movement that has gone on on college campuses, the left is as guilty as anyone. For example, the prohibition against [displaying] the Confederate flag. I had ancestors who fought on both sides [of the Civil War]." Though she saw a different meaning in that symbol, a black woman from Davis agreed with the man's conclusion. "Yes, my daughter's going to school, and yes, she may have to suffer through someone hanging a Confederate flag in the window or calling her a name. But once I accepted that I want the right to say what I want, I accepted that other people had to be allowed the same right, even though [what they say] may make you uncomfortable."

For some, the means of expression was important. "If you provide a nonviolent forum for people to give their beliefs, that's one thing. But it's something else to have someone standing out there on the campus, screaming they hate Jews and they should all take a [poison gas] shower," said a man from Florida. A woman from Mississippi agreed, suggesting that even the profound differences can be expressed with civility. "I think basic politeness is a large part of it," she said.

A woman from Davis, California, drew another distinction. "I think we need to question whether it's speech that's the problem or the attitude underlying the speech. Maybe we should spend more time and energy getting rid of hate rather than suppressing hateful speech. It's like putting a lid on a boiling kettle but keeping the fire going. Maybe we should turn down the flame rather than putting a lid on the kettle." In the posttest, 81 percent agreed that "We should not restrict free speech on campus. A better way to deal with racist attitudes is to encourage open discussion."

Participants also considered the issue of burning the American flag. The anguished conclusion reached by an older man from Irvine, California, reflected the views of most participants. "Burning the flag is repugnant to me. But, nevertheless, it is a symbolic act. If the intent is to express an opinion against the government, especially during a war effort, I think we have to allow it — as difficult as that would be for me."

The Limits to Free Speech: A Right Not to Hear

What nearly everyone in the Forums did agree on — indeed, what lay at the heart of most participants' concern about sex and violence in the media — was what they saw as the effects on children, especially the very young. A woman from Davis, California, said, "I'm concerned about very young children because I guess we can all agree those first seven years are so very important."

To general agreement, an Orange County woman said that violence on TV, including on children's programs such as cartoons, can have a long-term, desensitizing effect which leads children to become

indifferent to violence in real life. A woman from Florida echoed this sentiment, saying, "Violence on TV is very bad for young children because this becomes the norm for them. When my children watch a lot of [violence on TV], it becomes more acceptable when they're playing." A woman at the Forum at the University of California at Davis said, "I'm concerned about the young minds of today. I deal with children every day and what I see frightens me. It's because of the after-effect [violent movies and TV shows] have." An Atlanta area man said, "You get back to the old saying: 'Monkey see, monkey do.' Children imitate what they see." A woman from Davis said that TV had to have at least some effect. "You know the effect of television and advertising when your children have to have Reeboks, or one hundred dollar air pump shoes, or the Ninja Turtles," she said. "So you know they're being influenced."

Many expressed particular concern about sexually explicit material that comes into the home via television. "A lot of parents are concerned about the violence and explicit sex that gets into the [programming] time that should be for children," said a woman from Orange County. "Children are so vulnerable," said a man from Panama City. "They're vulnerable to pornography; they're vulnerable to that offensive music; they're vulnerable to so many things." Another man in that Forum said:

> Children really don't have any rights. They don't have a right to vote, or to say anything about how society is formed. So if we look over and see a lot of them getting hurt or kicked around or exposed to [sexually explicit] stuff, we have to do something to protect them.

If the issue of invasiveness were handled, many suggested, they could tolerate a great deal. A woman from Orange County said, "When you go into the video store, as long as the pornographic films are behind the little screen where children cannot go in — as long as [children] aren't exposed to it, I don't have a problem with anyone watching any video they want to."

In this vein, many drew a sharp distinction between cable television, which people pay to get, and network programming, which comes into every home, arguing that people should be able to watch violent or sexually explicit movies on TV if they pay for them. "We have pay channels where stuff is on the air after the children are in bed. Or they should be," said a man from California. A man from Cleveland, Mississippi, said:

> I'm an adult and I don't need someone else deciding what I want to see. But I have an eleven-year-old. I have cable TV, but I don't have HBO or Showtime because there are things on there that I prefer she not see. I can control what happens in my home. And if she were not there, I'd probably have HBO because there are things on there I'd like to see. Not topless performers, but some good movies you don't get on basic channels.

However, some also said that solutions currently in effect do not work. A man from Orange County said, "The 'family section' at Angel Stadium is some of the worst seats in the whole stadium. Why should families have to be put there? Why don't they put the people who swear, out in the worst seats?"

In fact throughout these Forums, and in every region, one of participants' primary concerns remained just this problem of invasiveness — the problem of people being involuntarily exposed to material they consider objectionable. And it went beyond a concern for children, to a feeling for the family, and the private life itself. Time and again, it was as though convictions about the freedom of expression had, as a corollary, concern about freedom *from* expressions that were unwanted and invasive.

A woman from Orange County said, "Let the listeners choose what they are going to be exposed to, not have it imposed on them. We keep talking about the freedom of the one who expresses, but I'd also like to be free from having to be expressed to, and to choose where that occurs." A woman from Irvine, California, said:

> As a child, I remember that to get anywhere in New York City, I had to walk past the 42nd Street businesses. As a child, then, I was very confused. Now, as a woman, I am really *offended*. I think there should be a right to have [pornography], but don't make me have to look at it when I'm walking down the street. Why do I have to feel attacked when I'm walking down the street?

A widely held concern proved to be that sexually explicit material often interferes with the family. A woman from one of the Forums held in Orange County said, "I'd like to be able to walk into Sea World, or the airport, or K-Mart without having my five-year-old exposed to things I don't think he should be exposed to."

Participants in the Forums generally agreed that government bans are not the answer in most cases. A Florida man said, "I think I've learned from this group that there's a lot more danger in placing restrictions than there is in allowing freedom of views. I think it's far more dangerous to suppress, rather than allow the expression." A man from Davis, California, said:

> I think it's a Pandora's box to employ any form of governmental restrictions. I think that people in open forums such as this one, or just people and communities in general, should actively express

their views, and they have the means for sanctioning the art, the movies, and other products that offend. I don't think it should come in any way from government restriction.

But while most Forum participants generally favored private, as opposed to government, restrictions on sexually explicit, violent, and other offensive speech, they did not believe the solution would be perfect; and most did not have confidence it would resolve the issue. By a post-Forum margin of 67 to 31 percent, participants agreed that "leaving the job of limiting offensive speech to record companies and the media will not work." A California woman advised that defining "community standards" was not easy. "If we are in the same community, but I don't agree with you, how are we going to arrive at that consensus?" And in every Forum, as participants considered the impact of the speech of others on their own and their families' freedom, there was a voice to suggest, as did a school teacher in California, "I feel very uncomfortable when I hear so much putting the government at a distance, so that they don't need to be involved."

Most felt that every "solution" would have an effect that could be undesirable, if carried too far. "There is no cure that does not cost," said a woman from Panama City. "If you limit someone's rights or limit the overall rights of the community for the purpose of creating a 'better society,' that means giving up some freedom."

Indeed, by the end of the Forums, most agreed with a California man who said the issue of exactly what forms of speech the First Amendment allows will never be settled, and that new issues will crop up over the next 200 years just as they have over the first two centuries of the existence of the Bill of Rights. However, to the extent that the thinking of these Forum participants reflect the considered judgment of the public as a whole, the verdict will be a pragmatic attempt to balance two competing values — and not an extreme reaction in one direction or the other. It will be a verdict showing a healthy respect for freedom of expression, but tempered by the profound concern — an undercurrent throughout these Forums — expressed in Davis, California, by a man who had been most eloquent in his advocacy of the right to free speech:

> What bothers me the most is that I'm fighting a losing battle with my kids around what they can see and do. I don't think you can win that one. I'm losing.

His well-managed but gnawing concern characterized these Forums: that somewhere we have lost control.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION:

A Response from the Media and from Capitol Hill

Bill Gray: *I hear a lot of what I just heard, right there, from members of my church. Some real problems about things that you see, things in society, and yet, at the same time, very concerned about where you draw the line, who draws that line — because, particularly in an African-American tradition, that line has meant a lot of different things for us. And it's been drawn by the majority, so there's a much keener sensitivity. I hear a lot of that — particularly on the sex and violence questions.*

Joseph Lieberman: *I find this to be the most perplexing of the three issues that we've discussed. Maybe because it's the one where there's least opportunity, and least appropriate opportunity, for government to do anything about it. However, what we're dealing with here is values, morality, and some of the trends in our society that are really most corrosive: the rise of violence, or sexual manipulation, control, demeaning sexual behavior and loss of control. A very poignant statement by one of the parents there — I believe it was a father — was that he finds himself fighting with other forces in society to have an influence on his children. I think that's part of what all of us feel. But this notion of freedom of expression is a bedrock principle in our country — it's right.*

David Mathews: *I think in this one there is the clearest contrast of all three between the debate that you hear on the floor of the Senate, or the Phil Donahue debate, and what you heard in the Forums. The official, or the standard, debate is always in absolute terms. It's absolutely this, or it's absolutely that. It's highly ideological; it's moralized. We didn't find that at all in the Forums. What we found was a totally different debate. It was not less agonized; it was not less difficult; there was not less conflict; but it was the kind of debate in which you thought maybe these folks might have a chance of solving the problem. When we hear people talk about it now — the official debate — they say it's not the kind of conversation that's ever likely to solve a problem; but the Forum debates are of people that are more likely to solve that problem.*

Tom Coleman: *I think David's comments were very appropriate because the issue when we had the NEA debate, for example, in Congress, was a black or white, either-or, situation. It was finally resolved because we were able to move to the middle. And Pat Williams and I, who were on this on the floor, were able to move that through with almost, overwhelming support eventually. But I guess I wonder how and why these things are framed on Capitol Hill with these contrasting, polarized positions. We have interest groups on both extremes, frankly, who get these hot-button issues.*

Ellen Goodman: *That's the problem, that the government is reacting to something that they see as a* hot *issue — which is a* cultural *issue. It's a very deep, resonant cultural issue. Every parent around this space considers themself part of the counterculture; we are countering the mainstream culture.*

Dan Yankelovich: *One of the most interesting features of these Forums that I find is the question: What changes in the course of these several hours? As we saw on the energy clip, what changed was a sense of urgency. Now, similarly, on this freedom of expression, at the beginning of the discussion large numbers of people thought in terms of government intervention. By the end of the discussion they had backed away from the government and were pointing to the community. So you see the effects of debate. It comes back to a point we were making earlier. I don't think that the media in the United States, partly for structural reasons, really understand the need for that kind of debate. When you report an instant poll, and you say that 70 percent of the public are against a gasoline tax, that's as if you're saying that's the end of the matter, rather than the beginning of it. Because, as Bill Gray pointed out, if you had some real discussion, you wouldn't necessarily have that 70 percent; it could become 30 percent. But unless you have the kind of discussion that we see in these Forums, replicated in the national scene, you will have this impulsive and mindless lurching, both on the part of government and on the part of the public.*

Ellen Goodman: *There's one other thing I was very conscious of in watching the difference between the public argument and the private argument. The public argument was a male argument in Congress. And these issues — particularly your sense of freedom being curtailed by the violence, the violent cultural atmosphere — are particularly deeply felt by a new generation of women, who in fact feel their freedom more limited by messages of violence than by some "no women need apply" sign on the door. And there's a tremendous gap between women talking in private life and* no *women talking in public life — excuse me, very few women talking in public life.*

Louise Slaughter: *Someone I really admire and have a*

great deal of respect for, and a lot of respect for his work, called me the other day. He'd been working on a story for a week about the Congress, and as he finished it up, the editor said: "Lo! there are no women here. We have not mentioned a single one."

John Chafee: *I think it was interesting that in the film clip it was a woman who anguished over it, and then said: "Government's a very blunt instrument," and suggested that wasn't the way to go.*

Louise Slaughter: *(interrupts Chafee): Women are smart.*

John Chafee *(laughter): Women are very smart. And I think that whole segment shows that the* people *are very smart. Let me just give you a tiny example of something that was a raging debate on the Senate floor. That dealt with: "Shall we have a constitutional amendment to ban the burning of the American flag." Now, you think that would be something that the people would be excited about. They weren't half as excited about it as the U.S. Senate was. It was fortunately defeated and I don't think any of us ever heard a word about it afterwards. So it just shows you that people get swept up in these emotions; and yet the people are way ahead of them out there, as these film clips showed. I think the important thing about these film clips was they showed how concerned the people were about government coming in and dictating. All of them had the anguish that was pointed up by the woman who can't walk on 42nd street, and had to go through this horrible maze of — I suppose it's pornographic ads and so forth that she saw. But still what I think we got from the group was deep caution about having government act as a censor.*

Joseph Lieberman: *Part of what this dilemma, this crisis, expresses is the failure of some of the nongovernmental institutions in our society. I think what also has to be said here is that the media institutions are at fault, and that some of it is — are — sins of omission and some are sins of co-mission. I was thinking of MTV for instance: you watch it, and I think about the impact it's having on America's children — sexual exploitation all over it, violence, demeaning treatment of women.*

Charlayne Hunter-Gault: *I don't disagree with a lot of what I'm hearing. And I think that we in the media are often captives of the political agenda, of government — which is why we don't break out sometimes into the kinds of debates that you're talking about. But the one thing that troubles me a lot is this word "values." I really do believe there are fundamental values that are associated with being an American, at least in the definition that I've known for my 50 years. But I think, today, one critical variable in all of this is different; it is that there are a lot of different values; and I don't know if your values are my values. So I have a lot of trouble saying that we have got to call on media institutions — albeit we bear much of the burden of this — or Congress or any other institutions to reassert the values.*

David Gergen: *I very much agree with what Senator Lieberman just said about the responsibility of the media. I think we have an enormous amount of power today without exercising an enormous amount of responsibility. But I really wanted to ask Dan Yankelovich something. My sense is that there are an awful lot of folks in this country trying to work their way through to better family life. They are now trying to . . . they are recognizing that the excesses of the past have enormous consequences which are not good. And I think one of the things that's good that's happening in this city is . . . My sense is that those questions, family policy questions and children's policy questions, are now taking a higher place on our national agenda here in Washington; and that there is greater hope, in some ways, for the nineties, as I think the pendulum . . . my sense is that the pendulum is swinging back toward greater value structure.*

Dan Yankelovich: *The pendulum almost never swings back; but the way it's swinging is very much the way you suggest — toward a reassertion of family values. With this difference: the family of today is not the family of yesterday. What a family is, is not being defined as a mom who stays at home, and a dad, and a couple of kids; but whatever you have . . . including — almost — a group of friends.*

Charlayne Hunter-Gault: *We have single parents out there who are concerned about things because they are fighting — by themselves alone — and don't have a man in the house: women who don't have a man in the house, who may be concerned about violence. But this kid at Jefferson High School in New York, some of whose classmates were just murdered by another classmate, talked about bringing a gun to school because — I think I remember the quote — "There's no one out there to protect us." He didn't get that from MTV. And there are a lot of things where, if you listen to some of the messages, the kids . . . For example, rap music! Well, we look at MTV, and we hear rap music, and we say* ipso facto *it's bad. But not all of it's bad. I talked to this kid, Ice-T, who does rap music and he said, "You know, these messages aren't decipherable by adults because they weren't meant for adults." So, I just caution us when we talk about values to be very, very careful about whose values we're talking about imposing, under what circumstances.*

A Note on the Methodology

The National Issues Forums (NIF) include more than 3,000 civic and educational organizations — colleges and universities, libraries, service clubs, and membership groups. Each community group is locally controlled, but NIF is a collaborative effort in that each year, convenors together choose three issues to address and use common materials, including print issue books and parallel audio and videotape material, that outline the nature of each issue and, in a nonpartisan way, the choices that it presents us as a people.

To gain greater insight about the conclusions Forum participants reach, as well as to understand better the reasoning behind their opinions, six special "Research Forums" were convened this year, on each of the three NIF topics, across the country. These Research Forums were audiotaped or videotaped, and the tapes transcribed to serve as part of the basis for this analysis. Approximately 100 participants attended the six Research Forums on each of the three issues. While this group is not, of course, a national probability sample yielding results within a precise margin of sampling error, the groups were demographically and, collectively, geographically diverse. The greatest value of this analysis, however, lies less with the precision of any given questionnaire item than with its qualitative aspects: the ability to discern what a broadly representative group of Americans feel after considering and talking about three intellectually complex, multifaceted issues in a serious, rigorously nonpartisan environment.

Data from the Research Forum questionnaires, as well as from similar questionnaires produced from the National Issues Forums nationwide (whose outcomes parallel those of the Research Forums), are available from: "A Public Voice," National Issues Forums, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.

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